

MAY 1974
Price Rs. 3

Parsiānā

Beaked
face head
Shoulder
Vulture-like
over table

Between acrobatics
The spider is still
Each stationary spot
A central spring
Of thought and feeling:
Stone wall, warm wood,
The flesh on my arm,

WHITE LOND
BEETHOVEN
OF PROP
YOU BE

A day the thing had cowered from
With animal persistence. Now it
Or would soon be dying. T
Through the first wintering
Maddened by the air-gun,

FUL AND LO
HEIR BEDS
DID THE H
CANNOT DO



And his future was bright once again.

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Parsiāna

April-May 1974

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editor's column

It is a common misconception that if a man is a Parsi he is not an Indian. "Are you an Indian first or a Parsi first?" people ask. To this searching question your Editor wearily replies, "I'm a citizen of the world first." Then while the interrogator looks on wonder-struck, I launch my all-purpose sermon. "To be a good citizen of the world you have to be a good Indian; to be a good Indian you have to be a good Parsi; to be a good Parsi you have to be a good Jehangir Patel." At this stage there is much applause as people vie with each other to shake my hand, proffer subscriptions and request me to talk to their children. There are those, however, who will stand back and whimper that anybody who admits to being a Parsi is "communal-minded." So when we approached the four subjects who grace this issue's cover they reacted to the label 'Parsi' Poets with varying intensity. Adil Jussawalla decried being called a Parsi and in the course of two phone conversations turned down our request for an interview; Keki Daruwalla found the ethnic tag irrelevant; Kersi Katrak raised no objections and Gieve Patel, who has written a play on the Parsis titled *The Princes*, agreed willingly.

While one or other of the poets shy away from the 'Parsi' label they do seem to direct their works towards a select readership comprised of their friends, critics and fellow poets. Their books are not available on the market and their publisher, P. Lal of the Writer's Workshop, shares the poets' reluctance in marketing their wares. When we wrote to Lal asking for a catalogue of his books we placed an order for all the published books of the four poets adding that "as we would intend to run this feature as soon as possible we would appreciate your giving this request your urgent attention", we received a printed post-card one and a half months later informing us that Lal was serving a term as a visiting professor in Ohio University, U.S.A. and that we could write to him there! Presumably without consulting him, high level decisions as to who may

or may not buy their publications cannot be made.

The poets' reaction to *Parsi-ana* is very much like the Parsi community's reaction to the April 1 issue of *Time* (why *Time* chose that particular issue to write on the Parsis will always remain a subject for speculation). While members of the community reeled under the shock that *Time* had the temerity to write on the Parsis without their authority, others sought to identify the individual who had "invited and authorized" the American newsweekly correspondent to come to Bombay (because our own system of election is undemocratic, the community does not always realize we are living in a democracy). As in all matters concerning the disposal of the dead the 'blame' was squarely put on Shiavax Vakil, who was one among the many interviewed for the article. Only a community suffering from delusions of grandeur could believe that an international magazine with a circulation of several million, which even the President of the United States cannot control, would be at the beck and call of a Panchayat Trustee. Clearly, the real reason *Time* carried the article (we have it from highly informed sources) was that *Parsi-ana* was eating into their Bombay circulation. Such was their concern that they even proposed opening a *Time* Doongerwadi bureau.

Parsis were also sore that, while the Muslims were able to ban an issue of *Time* which carried the Prophet Mohammed's picture, when they approached Ms Gandhi for the same—this not being an election year and with rising prices, shortages, the railway strike and so on—she burst a nuclear bomb instead.

Where *Time* did slip up was in not differentiating between the Parsi community and the Zoroastrian religion. This led them erroneously to state that "the religion does not accept converts." The religion does. In the landmark case of *Petit vs Jijibhai* in 1908, Justice Daver of the Bombay High Court noted: "The word Zoroastrian simply denotes the religion of the individual; the word Parsi denotes his nationality or community and has no religious signifi-

cance whatever attached to it ... A Zoroastrian need not necessarily be a Parsi. Anyone who professes the religion promulgated by Zoroaster—be he an Englishman, Frenchman or American—becomes a Zoroastrian the moment he is converted to the faith." The Court ruled that "*The Zoroastrian religion does admit and enjoin conversion*". That decision stands till this day. But *Time* can be forgiven for its error as most Parsis themselves confuse the issue.

On the Doongerwadi beat, a Resolution passed by the Panchayat at the behest of Ms Nelie Noble and her group marks one



of the blackest chapters in recent Parsi history. No matter what reason Parsis may ascribe to the barring of non-Parsis at our funeral ceremonies, the prime motivation for continuing this practice today is nothing short of racial discrimination. Parsis must think themselves superior to all others to believe that, while their presence at the funerals of non-Parsis has no adverse effect, the presence of non-Parsis at Parsi funerals is bound to defile the corpse and the fire. We are not the only community which venerates fire. Fire is essential for most Hindu ceremonies. The custom of placing sandalwood on the fire can hardly be of Persian origin as sandalwood does not grow in Iran. We borrow our customs, ceremonies, language (Gujerati) and dress (saris) from the Hindus; it was they who gave us refuge when we had no place to go; it was in a predominantly Hindu India that we thrived, and continue to prosper. And we show our gratitude by slamming our doors in their and others' faces when they come to pay their respects. These are times when one feels ashamed to call oneself Parsi.

In light of the fact that the Towers of Silence invariably arouse the most emotions, *Parsiana* has coined a new word: Dokhmania (dok-may-nya) *n*: characterized by mental and physical hyperactivity triggered off by any reference to dokhmas or dokhmanashini. Dokhmaniac *n*: a person characterized by an inordinate or ungovernable enthusiasm or aversion for dokhmas. Highest incidence among Parsis.

Parsis will be pleased to know that the intensity of dokhmania is decreasing (this is not to be mistaken for any corresponding increase in the concern for the living). With the tightening of the laws concerning the presence of non-Parsis at Doongerwadi, people who did not object to dokhmanashini but found the surrounding customs odious, may now choose alternative methods for disposal of the dead. Both Dara Cama and Dhanjisha Joshi, staunch advocates for reform, say they can send priests to perform the necessary ceremonies for burial or cremation. Cama's phone numbers are: 353207 and 252658, and his

address is: Bacha Mansion, Tardeo Road, Opp. Bhatia Hospital, (near Bolton Art Litho Press), Bombay-400 007. Joshi's number is: 263820 and his address is: Jiji House, Opp. Sterling Cinema, Raveline Street, Bombay. Let us hope now that the controversy will be solved and some sanity restored to this much divided community.

In other more heartening developments, four trustees of the Parsi Panchayat have contributed their mite to this issue. We wrote to all seven trustees concerning our interview feature "Are There Too Many Fire Temples in Bombay?" Erach Nadirshah, Dr. Aspi Gollwalla, Shiavax Vakil and P. P. Khambatta replied. We applaud and greatly appreciate their gesture. It is our sincere hope that Trustees of the Panchayat will continue to make their thoughts known to the public either through *Parsiana* or any other media.

While on the subject of fire temples, Rusi B. Pastakia of Jamshedpur sent us a clipping from *The Tisco News* on the Jamshedpur *Agiary*:

"The Parsee Fire Temple in Jamshedpur is situated amidst a beautiful garden with lovely flowering trees, bushes, creepers, roses and seasonal plants. It was here that the holy Fire, which the Parsees revere, was installed in 1960. The day was 3rd March, the birthday of Jamshedji Tata, a day of universal rejoicing in Jamshedpur. The holy Fire has an interesting history. It has been burning in the Cursetjee Maneckjee Shroff Agiary of the Khada Parsee in Bombay since 1790. The Trustees of the *agiary*, which had fallen on lean days, were finding it difficult to keep the holy Fire burning and approached the Parsees of Jamshedpur to establish the Cursetjee Maneckjee Shroff Agiary there. The offer was accepted and the setting up of the *agiary* fulfilled the long-cherished dream of the Parsees in Jamshedpur to have their place of worship in the steel city.

"Situated on Straight Mile Road, the solemnly impressive *agiary* was planned and designed by Mr. J. K. Gora of Ballardie, Thompson and Mathews, the famous architects of Calcutta. By a happy coincidence, Mr. Gora descends

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"The *agiary* caters to the ceremonial and religious needs of the Parsee community. Every Sunday, a class on religious instructions is held for boys and girls. It is managed by a Board of seven Trustees with the assistance of an Honorary Secretary and an Honorary Treasurer."

Let us hope Trustees of other *agiaries* which are not frequented and whose resources are scarce will not hesitate to shift or amalgamate the fire temples for the greater benefit of the community.

Sappy Dinshaw, Editor of *Dipanjali* and a trustee of the Delhi Anjuman, has written (see Letters Page) in defence of Nadir Mulla, President of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat. While it is not our intention to quibble we would like to note that nowhere did we state in our December issue that the decision to oust Ms Marker from the Executive Council meeting of the Federation of Zoroastrian Anjumans of India was taken by Mr. Mulla. We only stated that he *instigated* the removal. The committee may well have been within

its rights to bar the press. As Mr. Mulla has stated to us in a letter, "As far as I am aware, the Press is not permitted to be present at Committee Meetings." Granted; but when does the general body of the Federation meet that the press can cover the same? If only committee meetings are held, then how is the community to know what decisions are arrived at and for what reason and who voted how? In a democracy, the voters must know precisely what their elected representatives are doing, and why. If the press is barred from committee meetings and no general body meetings are held what is the alternative? Mr. Dinshaw mentions a statement was released to the press. Despite making inquiries with him and Mr. Mulla, we have not received the same to date. The Press can be a helpfully or a damaging adversary, depending on how those in power handle it.

In other out-of-town news, Shapur K. Vazifdar has written in to tell us of the Navsari Jarthosti Hunnar Udyog Kelavani Fund;

"The main purpose of this Trust is especially to divert those youngsters in the community who are not suited for higher education to industrial and vocational lines of training. It is intended not only to help Parsi youngsters in their programme of technical and industrial training but also to provide them with financial assistance by way of loans for starting small scale industries or businesses in Navsari, such as auto-rickshaws, flour mills, electric-wiring, shop-keeping etc.

"A detailed survey of the Parsis in Navsari has been carried out recently and it shows that there is quite a large number of Parsi youths who deserve and are prepared to take assistance on the above lines. By starting such a programme for those who deserve and need it badly the number of unemployed people can be reduced and this will help bring about a much needed change in our community's economic position. This scheme, if applied on a larger scale, can rejuvenate the community's position in Navsari, in particular, and South Gujarat in general.

"Navsari, which was once a

small, agricultural town, is advancing by leaps and bounds and can now boast of many large and small industries. In diamond-cutting Navsari is on the world map. The spurt in industry has resulted in an appreciable increase in trade and commerce and the population which is now on the verge of about one lakh is steadily increasing. Unfortunately, however, it is found, among the younger generation of the community in Navsari and other places in South Gujarat, there is an urge to leave their home towns and villages and to crowd into cities like Bombay. One reason is that in their own towns and villages, for lack of proper encouragement, they experience frustration resulting from a lack of employment and opportunity. The glamour of city life attracts them, often resulting in ultimate disillusionment. The scheme of the above Trust will provide Parsi youths with adequate means of livelihood and will keep them in their local homes where the air is cleaner, and life more tranquil, than in a city. It may be noted that recreational facilities for young people in Navsari are now many and on the increase.

"Navsari is the home of Parsi culture in India. The heavy and continuous decrease in its population is therefore a distressing situation. This alarming condition, if not arrested in time, will prove calamitous to the community in more ways than one. Much debate on this point is being heard in the community but, characteristically, nothing seems to have been done effectively. The above scheme has in it zeal, ambition and potential—but no funds. A humble beginning with small donations was made by providing financial assistance to one boy for boarding, lodging etc. while he was trained in motor driving. Two other boys from poor families from nearby villages have undergone training in auto-rickshaws driving, and auto-repairs.

"It will be universally agreed that such a scheme requires substantial funds. A graceful donation of Rs. 5,000 from Lady Hirabai Jehangir as an initial help enabled the organisers to provide an auto-rickshaw to one of the boys, who has been earning in-

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dependently for himself for the last two months and is at the same time returning the loan taken by him from the Trust for the purchase of the rickshaw.

"It is sincerely expected that the community will respond favourably by way of substantial donations to this very laudable scheme. Cheques should be drawn in favour of Navsari Jarthosti Hunnar Udyog Kelavani Fund. Donations may be sent to the Hon. Secretary, Dara K. Deboo, Advocate, Agiary Street, Navsari."

From England Sarosh Khajotia writes to say that he plans yet another road trip to Bombay, his tenth round-trip in 20 years. Sarosh is 73 years old and minus his right hand. He lost it over 45 years ago, while working as an electrical contractor. A dynamo which had been hoisted on a tree fell and crushed the hand, severing it from the body. He then characteristically headed for the hospital on his own steam. Sarosh writes he is willing to give a free lift to anybody who wishes to come along for the trip. The passenger will have to bear personal expenses. "I'll pay for the gas, car maintenance and the ferry crossing, which is very high now, £12 for the car and £3 per per-

son," he writes. The trip will take around four weeks. Anyone interested should write to him at 14 Harley Road, Swiss Cottage, London N.W.3; Phone 722-1174.

In local news Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw addressed a gathering to commemorate the 59th birth anniversary of the late Col. Leslie Sawhny. With his humour very much in evidence, Manekshaw asked the assembly, "What do Caesar, Napoleon, Wellington, Cleopatra, Indira Gandhi and Sam Manekshaw have in common?" According to the Field Marshal, "long noses." He then proceeded to divulge little known facts about well-known soldiers: that Wellington had more ladies and officers' wives in his presence than staff officers the night before a battle; that though it is said that the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton, Wellington hated to play games, and that in Caesar's Rome the cry was "Caesar, Caesar is every woman's husband."

Now for a little known fact about Manekshaw: while officially his initials are listed at S.H.F.J. it is alleged that the initials should be S.H.F.H. It seems that Manekshaw was in search of a fourth initial and not having the oppor-

tunity to determine what exactly it was, he chose at random J for Jamshedji.

Our parting shot to our readers is a painful one. Due to the phenomenal rise in prices since we took over *Parsiana* last August, a 100 per cent increase in the price of paper, plus a 50 per cent rise in the cost of printing, and a 20 per cent rise in the price of blocks, we are forced to increase our rates in order to survive. As ours is a specialized magazine, our circulation is limited and we do not benefit from the economies of scale experienced by general publications.

As we feel the community benefits by having a publication solely devoted to its welfare, we are reluctant to change *Parsiana* into any other kind of magazine. Aside from the investment we put in to launch *Parsiana*, we incur a monthly loss of over Rs. 3,000. As our resources are limited and as we receive no institutional help, we have to depend upon our readers and our advertisers. Even with the price rise, our losses will be substantial. It is only the belief that there are those who value *Parsiana* and will support it, that keeps our spirits high.

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The Doongerwadi Ban

The absurd custom of not allowing non-Parsis to see the face of the dead makes no sense to any intelligent and broad-minded person. It is most unfortunate that the Bombay Parsi Panchayat and its adherents are obstinate in their attitude. The leadership of the Panchayat lacks the sense of appreciation of the modern trends and does not move with the times.

However, in spite of the dislike (rather, disapproval) of the orthodox priests and the so-called brute majority of the Parsi community, this practice is not being adhered to by the broad-minded Parsis of Jamshedpur. Non-Parsis are allowed to respect and pay the last homage to their departed Parsi souls after the *ghey-sarna* ceremony.

RUSI B. PASTAKIA

Apart from it being the only right and honourable way to act, it would be in our own interest to throw open our doors to the members of our sister communities with good grace when they approach our sacred precincts with the intention of offering their respects or worship in a proper and becoming manner. Keeping them at an offending distance at such times—apart from it being a shameful and wrong thing to do—might ultimately induce some of them one day to burst through

these doors we have shut in their faces, intent upon desecration.

The time may perhaps not be far away when humiliating notices such as "For Parsis Only" will have to come down to be replaced by more humane ones such as, "Open To All".

Let us break down the hateful walls that our community has erected to segregate and isolate itself from all other communities, right now! Let us not wait for the day when some from amongst our own community may find it expedient to invite members from our sister communities to join together in offering organised *Satyagraha* wherever these hurtful barriers exist, particularly at the Towers of Silence in Bombay, and to batter at them till the walls come tumbling down!

Satyagraha offered under such circumstances would provide the most appropriate answer to an unyielding Parsi community which obstinately persists in anti-Zarathushtrian practices, under the influence of false teachings advanced by interested priests who have provided apocryphal scriptures and primitive customs for their doubtful authority.

Let us observe the temper of the times and take notice of the writing on the wall and come to our senses before it is too late, for that way alone lies the salvation of our community. The removal of these racist walls would regenerate Parsis into becoming more faithful followers of our Holy Prophet Zarathushtra, whose selfless and beneficent message of Righteousness and the Universal Law, the Good and Loving Mind, Power of Detachment, Faith and Devotion, Perfection and Immortality was intended by him for acceptance by all mankind, and for the good of all.

MAHYAR BYRAMJI PATEL

The decomposing dead bodies are to be disposed of for the sake of hygiene of the living rather than for any benefits of the dead. *Geh-sarna* and *uthamna* ceremonies are of a social nature while friends

come to offer sympathies in the bereavement. They have no touch of religion as such. They don't touch the dead in any way.

All our priestly death ceremonies are Hindu in nature. Ritual in the Prophet's religion of the Gathas is singularly absent. Beyond the Hindu *geh-sarna* and *uthamna* ceremonies adopted by us, their *chothiu* is our *charam*, their *dasmu* is our *dasmu*, their *masio* is our *masio*, their *be-masio* is our *bamsi*, their *chha-masio* is our *chhamsi*, their *bar-masio* is our *varsi*, and their *shraddh* is our *muktad*. In such ceremonies of theirs everybody is welcome. Why must we Parsis make inhuman gestures at the time to other human beings coming to offer their sympathies? Let them join in. The only ceremony of Zoroastrianism is society. Seclusion is sacrilege. Drive the dog away and lead the humans in. This will be the sure way to heaven for the dead because the redemption of a Zoroastrian soul is not through *geh-sarna* or *no-sarna*, but through one's humane acts only.

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Leaving unwept the community's youths

Who shed their petals one by one.
Wilfred.

Therefore, let us Parsis think. Let us make our religion cleaner and more practical.

DARA J. CAMA

The Fire and the River

One of the reasons given by Parsis against the cremation of their dead as a suggested alternative to their present method is that fire is sacred, and it cannot be contaminated by burning the dead.

This attitude is rather misleading because unlike other elements, fire purifies and remains untainted forever. The ashes and the bones of the dead can be consigned to the waters of a holy river. (This method is followed among the Hindus). This action is a symbolic gesture: just as rivers ultimately reach the ocean, man's life may be finally merged with the ultimate in everlasting peace and harmony.

If we were to stretch the logic of the sacred and the profane, we can never stoop to use fire for any such purposes as cooking, washing, lighting, smoking or any other day to day needs of Man. The human body deprived of the soul, remains but clay and if it is something profane, the sun should never be allowed to shine on it. But the sun shines equally on the sinner and the saint and the classification of pure and impure is but that of human calculation and not that of the sun. What is fire but a portion of the sun? This view ought to make the Parsis think, and think deeply.

A. N. BHAT

"An Appeal"

In your March issue there is an appeal by Hasman Industries "to the educated and erudite but misguided members of our Community who indulge in needless controversies" over the disposal of the dead.

The Appeal has given a title—Critics—to the educated and the erudite and says that "each mode of disposal of whom other than

Dokhma-Nashini, our elders have found to be inconsistent with the tenets of our dear religion."

I feel this appeal should have been made to the "Elders" rather than to the "Critics" with the request to show more toleration and afford alternate methods of disposal of the dead to such of the members of the Community who conscientiously object to *Dokhma-Nashini* and not to deny them the final rites and ceremonies by the priests.

The tenets "of our dear religion" are contained in the Holy Gathas only and these neither mention nor advocate *Dokhma-Nashini*.

At present the most "crucial question facing the existence of the Community" is the keeping of its members in one fold. There are many instances where Parsis have left the fold and embraced other religions just to avoid *Dokhma-Nashini*.

Personally I feel that if the elders i.e. the Trustees of the Panchayats, Anjumans and Samajs and the Dastooris with shawls and insignia, afford equal facilities for burials or cremations within their own control, this controversy will end and a better solidarity will be maintained in the community.

SHEHERYAR KAOOSJI

Should Parsis Leave Bombay?

I was quite amused to read Feroza Paymaster's interviews "Should Parsis leave Bombay?" in your last issue. For your readers, I freely translate from a recent Marathi play, *Sandhya Chhaya* by Jaywant Dalvi. An old couple try to convince their only surviving son about the advisability of returning to India and not staying in the United States as he had been doing for over eight years. Becoming a little irritated, he says to his father, "What is there left in India to come back to? You are advising me to either waste my time as a sub-engineer here in the P.W.D. or asking me to start a business. You just don't seem to have an idea as to what it means to start business here. Go to Delhi and you will not escape the feeling that every man there is

living on a bribe given by someone. They have named their roads after Justice, Truth, and called them Nyaya Marg, Niti Marg, Satya Marg, and so on. In fact they have shown the way out to all these principles. To get a five-paisa ticket you have to wait for an hour in a queue. Pens and pins in a bank on Justice Road (Nyaya Marg) are invariably stolen. Frankly, Daddy, I don't feel that these are my people or this can be my country."

You will find that this kind of feeling of alienation and despondency is overwhelming people of all castes, race and religions. In fact some time back when I was participating in a discussion on "Who is an Indian?" I had defined that anyone who genuinely suffers from a feeling of alienation and considers himself a refugee coming from a forgotten home, should be considered an Indian. So it seems that all of us, irrespective of race or religion, because of our predominantly narcissistic nature face this dilemma from time to time and yet we must realize that there

is no other place where we can go and feel completely at home. In fact it is doubtful whether you can even be a first class citizen anywhere else. It only shows that if the Parsis, who are probably some of the more extroverted people here, suffer from such sad feelings, then we are probably at the most despondent of times in many a decade.

A. A. DESHPANDE

The Delhi Ouster

Mr Shiavax Nargolwalla has requested me to point out an error in the article "From Delhi with Love" (*Parsiana*, December 1973 January 1974) in the second column on page 13 where it has been mentioned that Parsis "have always expressed the desire to be cremated here." The reference to cremation is not correct, as we have a burial ground and provide burial facilities only.

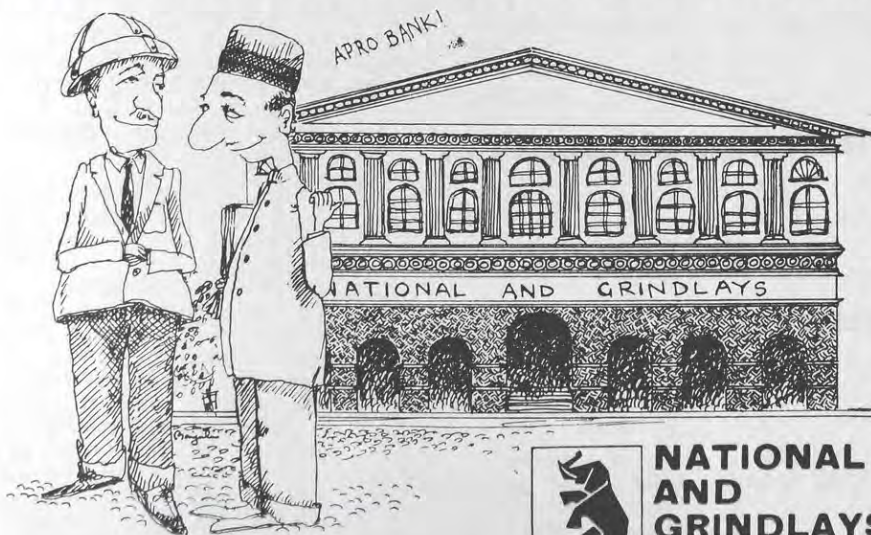
As regards the incident in which Ms Sanobar Marker was not permitted to take verbatim notes of the discussions in the Executive

Council meeting held in Delhi on 27th January, I have been asked to inform you that the decision not to allow her to do so, was not taken exclusively by Mr. Nadir Mulla but was the unanimous view of all the delegates attending the Council meeting. While we support the freedom and independence of the Press, you will appreciate that it would cause more harm if delegates do not feel free to express their views on certain issues because of the presence of the Press. I understand that the Press is not generally invited to meetings of management boards, committees etc., where it is important that members should feel free to express their frank views and opinions.

The Delhi Parsi Anjuman arranged an open meeting of all the members of the Anjuman to meet the delegates who had come to attend the Federation meeting. Mr. Mulla and other delegates spoke on the occasion and answered a number of questions raised by members relating to the meeting of the Federation held the same

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morning. The decisions arrived at in the Federation meeting were reported by the Chairman, Mr. Mulla, to the members at the open meeting. I understand that Ms Marker was present at the open meeting and the reception that followed and was free to ask any question concerning the morning's deliberations. I also understand that the Federation later issued a statement to the Press giving the decisions reached at the Federation meeting.

S. J. DINSHAW
New Delhi.

(No statement has been received to date despite our making enquiries for the same.—Ed.)

The Green Fields of Habbal

I would like to correct an error in your editor's column in the last issue relating to the late Captain Lalkaka. Long before he died, he had changed his mind about being buried, and told his wife Manija (who has passed away also) that, "for me the green fields of Habbal," and he was put in the *dokhma* at Habbal, and not buried.

I look back with nostalgia—the repartees that went on between the late Nusserwanjee Dinshaw and "K.K." as he was affectionately

called. Yes, both men had character and very positive views. Yet they were tolerant towards one another in spite of being poles apart, big enough to love and respect each other.

I was in Bangalore when K.K. came back to the "fold" as one might say, and I don't think I will be wrong in stating that Manija and her sister Ratan, and Nusserwanjee played a great part in bringing him back. He was great enough to come back. "To please my darling wife" he would say with a mischievous twinkle in his eye!"

BHICOO MANEKSHAW
New Delhi.

(The Editor regrets the error)

Share it

Most Parsis are convinced of the superiority and effectiveness of the Zoroastrian religion. Yet, they are so blinded by meaningless orthodoxy that they have perverted its basic tenets. Isn't it the aim of every religion to teach a sense of brotherhood and unity with all men? If our religion is so superior and so effective, shouldn't we be eager to share it with other men, who are our brothers after all? Why jealously guard it? I do not advocate forcible conversion, but let whoever wants to con-

vert, embrace the religion. We will enrich it, by sharing it.

J. K. GORIMAR

Clubwala Jadhav

Being born by a historical accident in a Hindu family, I have always been an ardent student of minority communities of India—their problems, potentials and plight. I have been particularly interested in the Parsi community for their contribution to India's development, their foresight and unique nationalism and their traditional blending into an alien community.

I have known Mary Clubwala Jadhav rather closely. I thought that you ought to have brought out the personal tragedy that befell her recently. Her 44 year old son Phiroze, an only child, expired on 17th January, 1974. Hers is an example worth emulating, in as much as that, tragedy after tragedy, she does more and more for the deprived.

BABU V. PATEL

Cyrus Plaque

Many members of the Cyrus Celebration Committee and general public of our community have been enquiring as to what has happened to the silver plaque of 'Cyrus the Great' that was prepared in Bombay by Mr. Hormuzdiar Choksi. At a recent function held at Cusrow Baug, Lady Hirabai Jehangir had presented the same to the Consul General of Iran to be sent as a gift to His Imperial Majesty Shahenshah Aryamehr.

I am presently in Iran and today, I took a day's conducted tour of Tehran. Amongst many interesting places, I visited the Shahyad Aryamehr Monument. The first hall that we entered is a museum and there I was thrilled and delighted to see the silver plaque sent by our Zoroastrian community of India. It is placed in a very prominent spot. It is all the more gratifying to find three other plaques, not of silver but of other Iranian workmanship, amongst which one is from the Zoroastrian community of Iran. There are no other exhibits that came as gifts.

DINSHAW BEHRAM IRANI

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Parsiana Calendar

My congratulations to you for bringing out the best Parsi calendar I have seen so far. Please do not feel, I am criticising, but I notice that you have printed the Parsi 'roj' in English and Gujarati whereas the Parsi months appear only in Gujarati. The Sir was omitted from Jamshedji Jeejeebhoy. Also, the Y.Z. Year appears nowhere but only English Calendar Year 1974. In my view, these are serious omissions. It would have been perhaps better to give a brief life sketch of the 12 illustrious persons, even five to seven lines each.

And perhaps, a few important festive occasions, like the Prophet's birthday, death day, *ghambars*, etcetera would have added greater value. Perhaps next year you might incorporate such things, if there is no paper shortage. Only one additional page would have provided this information. Perhaps at the end. Otherwise, the size, get up, printing are really excellent.

The study of calendars also happens to be my favourite subject. A calendar as existed in the time of Darius the Great has been reconstructed with all the names of months except two, which are still not deciphered. We all know, our calendar is defective. During 1967, after great deliberation of several on and off attempts over a period of years, I devised a simple method of figuring out Parsi *Roj-Mahs* Y.Z. Years from English calendar dates and vice-versa. It was my hope, some Parsi calendar would include the same some day. But how many Parsis even in Bombay know the names of the 30 *rojs*? If you ask them the names of the 12 months, 98 per cent would fail and if asked for *Ghambars*, perhaps 99.9 per cent would fail, so who would bother to break their heads to convert *rojs Mahs* Y.Z. Years into English or vice-versa?

JAMSHED PAVRI
Vancouver, Canada

I received the beautiful Parsiana calendar and felt happy to see the pictures of our dear old Parsis of the good old days. I feel so proud of being a *Parsan*, belonging to a community who is world famous for their greatness and good deeds. May their holy *fravashis* rejoice in the abode of peace and songs, protect the *Parsas* and drive good sense into their heads.

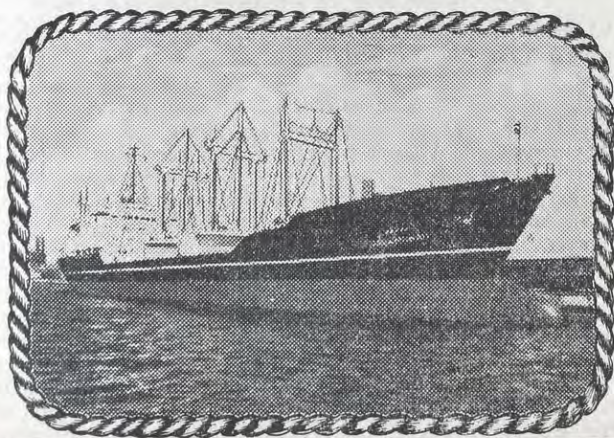
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THE DOONGERWADI BAN

"The *Bunglis* are meant for the exclusive use of Parsi or Irani Zoroastrians. From the time the *sachkar* ceremony is started until the time *chahrum* ceremony is completed no non-Zoroastrians shall be permitted to be present in the Hall of the *bungli* or in its retiring rooms."

With these words the Parsi Panchayat launched at the behest of the orthodoxy its strongest blow against any move for reform in the controversial customs and ceremonies surrounding the disposal of the dead. By bowing to the wishes of those Parsis who believe that the presence of non-Parsis at the funeral prayers defiles and impurifies the body and the sacred fire, the Panchayat alienated a growing segment of the community that resent the ban and in whose families non-Parsis have married and are marrying. It also indirectly strengthened the hands of the opponents of *dokhmanashini* who may now capitalize on the Panchayat ruling to initiate the flood toward the crematoriums and burial grounds. With the Doongerwadi estate facing a deficit of Rs 25,000 this year and a projected deficit of 50,000 next year, fewer Parsis opting to go to the Towers could mean the death-knell of *dokhmanashini*. To cover the cost of maintaining the Towers, Parsis will have to end up paying a larger sum than ever before, either individually or through subsidies. But with the Panchayat having few sources of income, most of their assets lying fallow, raising money for any project is difficult.

The controversy over the presence of non-Parsis at Doongerwadi came to a head at the funeral of Dr. Major Aderbad B. Irani (see Editor's Column) president of the Iranian Zoroastrian Anjuman. Among those present at the funeral ceremonies was his English daughter-in-law, Barbara. On the day of the *paidus* no objection was raised to her presence but two days later at the *uthamna* the priests objected and reluctantly Barbara, accompanied by her husband, Dr. Daryush—



Barbara Irani: A very Holier-Than-Thou attitude

Aderbad's only off-spring left the main hall and adjourned to a side room.

The news of Barbara's presence spread like wild fire throughout the community. A letter appeared in the *Kaiser-I-Hind* applauding the act and a few days later the *Jam-e-Jamshed* wrote an indignant editorial decrying the incident and asking the trustees to form rules and regulations to prevent its recurrence. Three Dasturs, Khurshed Shapoorji Dabu, Kaikhushroo JamaspAsa and Hormazdiar Mirza, wrote to the Panchayat making the same plea. The trustees convened a special urgent board meeting and passed the resolution which required

family members to sign a statement to the effect that non-Parsis would not be permitted to enter the *bunglis* while the prayers were in session. The priests and the Doongerwadi staff were authorized to prevent non-Zoroastrians from entering and if they did so to stop the prayers. With mounting criticism of the resolution and the realization that the same would probably not hold good in a court of law—as the Doongerwadi trust deed specifies the land be used for the disposal of the dead and to deny Parsis this right would be a violation of its intent—the trustees may decide to rescind the resolution and put up a notice instead. But with Ms Nelie Noble and her

group supporting the resolution, the Panchayat may shy away from a confrontation.

At the nerve centre of this dark chapter stands a twenty-five year old, soft-spoken, flaxen-haired orthoptist, Barbara Irani. When asked her reaction to the resolution, she said it was "rather sad. No one has been able to give me a satisfactory answer why non-Parsis are not allowed in the *agiaris* and at certain ceremonies. I am told only in Bombay this ruling is laid down. In Delhi and Jamshedpur it is not the custom. I've asked many people why it is so in Bombay. They reply the Parsi Panchayat makes the law. Parsis say that fire is sacred and anybody who is not born a Zoroastrian is going to defile the fire or have a bad influence on it. If that is the reason then I feel it is a very Holier-Than-Thou attitude."

Barbara, who has been married to Daryush for a year and a half, says she attended the prayers out of love and respect for her father-in-law. "He was like a father to me. When he died it was such a shock to us all. We didn't stop to think. We were too dazed. We just went. I attended the prayers as any daughter would for her father.

"People tell me the Parsi community is the most Westernized,

the most forward looking. This I would say is not true. When I was in England I thought the ban was the custom in this country and that Hindus and Muslims and all communities practised it. But it is not so. It is only the Parsis. It was difficult for me to understand, coming from a religion like my own, which has no bar. Anybody who enters a church in my country gets the protection of the church, no matter who he is.

"Every religion has customs which to others seem strange. A non-Parsi may not comprehend the significance of the *Navjote* ceremony; a Parsi may find Baptism strange. One should not criticize. But when one starts dictating to other people what they should do, religion loses its significance. The ban on non-Parsis entering is just as meaningless as the Pope saying that Catholics cannot eat meat on Fridays."

Barbara, who treats squint defects at Dr. Irani's Eye Clinic, feels that the Panchayat does a "fairly good job of administering to the hospitals, schools and looking after the poor. It's very praiseworthy. The only other community I can liken the Parsis to is the Jewish Kibbutz community. But when they (the Panchayat) start to make rules and regulations, they exceed their rights. If a rule

is passed, it must be by the will of the people, not just the Panchayat. The whole community should have a say in the matter, because religion is a very personal thing.

"A survey of people in the U.K. showed that only 10 per cent were regular church-goers. One reason for this low turnout was that the Church did not modernize itself to suit the changing life-styles. The language and the sermons did not keep up with the times. It became obvious that until some radical reforms were introduced the numbers would continue to dwindle rapidly.

"This is what is happening to the Parsi community here. I was quite shocked to find that the *sudra* and *kusti* mean nothing to many people who wear them. Tying the *kusti* is just a ritual that they perform every morning. You can't blame them. The services and prayers are in an ancient Persian language. What do they mean? Prayers are for the people and if they don't understand them they lose their significance. Merely saying prayers isn't going to set you right with God. It is what is in your heart and in your mind which counts. Rituals don't really have so much meaning. It's the basic principles that count, the contents of the parcel, and not the wrapping, that matter."

DRAFT as revised by the Chairman Mr. Nadirshah R. Mulla. RESOLVED that

The Bunglis are meant for the exclusive use of Parsi or Irani Zoroastrians. From the time the *Sachkar* ceremony is started until the time *Chahrum* ceremony is completed no non-Zoroastrians shall be permitted to be present in the Hall of the Bungli or in its retiring rooms. To give proper effect to the above, the following rules and regulations are framed to carry out the religious sanctions behind the ceremonies:

RULES

(a) A copy of these and other Rules if any that may be framed will be printed and signature of the relatives of the deceased shall be taken thereon before the body is

admitted into the Hall or the Bungli.

(b) Once the 'Sachkar' ceremony has started no non-Zoroastrian will be permitted to enter the Hall or the Bungli when any ceremony of any kind is being performed.

(c) The Staff and the workers at Doongerwadi have been authorised to see that no non-Zoroastrian enters the Hall when any ceremony is being performed. Appropriate instructions have been issued to the staff and the workers to ensure that these rules are strictly complied with.

(d) The mobeds are being requested not to perform any ceremony if a non-Zoroastrian is present.

FURTHER RESOLVED

(a) that this resolution be

published in all the Gujarati Parsi papers, namely, *Jame Jamshed*, *Kaiser-e-Hind*, *Bombay Samachar* and *Parsi Avaz*.

(b) that a copy of the rules be put up on a notice board in a prominent place in each Bungli both in English and in Gujarati.

(c) that a copy of the resolution be forwarded to the Trustees and Dasturs in charge of every *atash behram* and *agiar* in Bombay with a request to kindly instruct all *mobeds* not to perform any ceremonies from the *Sachkar* until the *Chahrum* if a non-Zoroastrian is present.

(d) that the Athornan Mandal be written to with a request to kindly take necessary action in the matter.

THE PARSI QUARTET

BY GEETA DOCTOR

Keki Daruwalla
The Poet from Lucknow

With the publication of *Under Orion* in 1970, followed by *Apparition in April* and yet another collection of poems to come, Keki Daruwalla's meteoric rise has proved that he has one quality which sets him apart from his fellow poets—and that is stamina. Not that it is necessarily a virtue, but in Daruwalla's case stamina implies, besides endurance, a certain toughness and determination to face the problem squarely, which gives to his best work a note of integrity that is hard to ignore.

Several factors serve to distinguish Daruwalla's poetry, not the least one of them being the fact that as Deputy Inspector General of Police in Uttar Pradesh, he presents the somewhat unique combination of a policeman who writes poetry. This is, of course, not to suggest that every policeman in Uttar Pradesh has now a good chance of becoming unique by writing poetry, but there is no doubt that the perspective that Daruwalla brings to his work is conditioned by the singular position that he finds himself in. In several poems such as, "Graft," "Death by Burial," "Curfew-In a riot torn city," he is actualizing his particular experience as a policeman which in moments of crisis confronts him with the terrifying responsibility which every individual might have to face, but with which he alone cannot compromise. As, for instance, he notes with dispassionate bitterness in the poem "Routine" while having to break up a student riot,

Poets are rare birds in the best of climates. In the atrophied atmosphere of Indo-English poetry their number is so small as to enable us to count them on our fingers. Keki Daruwalla for example feels that there are only ten who can qualify as major poets and while there may be a difference of opinion on the subject (an enterprising editor has exhumed about a hundred and thirty-two people who at some time or another might have had a poetic thought) it is remarkable that out of this small proportion, four should be Parsis. Whether this is of significance in itself it is difficult to say since the label of "Parsi Poet" is one which the poets themselves have rejected as being irrelevant. But "Poets," said Herbert Read, "are the advance guard of society" and it is in this context that we have sought to interview and examine the work of these four poets who are in the front line.



*I alone point
my barrel into them as I squeeze
the trigger*

The rest aim into the sun!

His poetry reflects the tension arising from the horror that he feels over a certain situation and the cool professional manner in which he is trained to handle it. This detachment, which is necessary to the policeman, is also invaluable to the poet, for it enables him to recapture his experience in sharp insistent images that hold our attention as relentlessly as the glittering eye of the Ancient Mariner held that of the unwilling wedding guest in Coleridge's famous poem.

The story that Daruwalla unfolds is no less enthralling. While the majority of Indo-English poets have only their cluttered urban backgrounds to wallow in, Daruwalla strides out in the open country. And it is a wild, surrealistic country, with the moon

dripping blood and bandits crawling through ravines, where a stalactite becomes a symbol of cosmic vitality and a snake transforms itself into an infinitely more sinister creature and becomes a *Haranag!* Even if he were to project his impressions in prose they would make exciting reading; in poetry they take on mythic proportions.

Daruwalla writes about the Indian landscape, its people and its myths with a minimum amount of self-consciousness. In treading through his daily round of horrors he seldom falls into the pit of sentimentality, even if the creatures he chooses, such as "The Epileptic" or the leper woman, reflect his tendency to pick out those aspects that are not possible to view objectively. Yet he forces himself to view even these with a controlled chilling irony that whips his feelings into shape and gives his poems their driving force. His use of irony is varied and subtle, disguised in the entire tone of the poem itself, in a poem such as "To Writers Abroad"

*You wish to write on India, Sir?
This way please!*

*..... ..
It sure feels good, Sir,
discussing pus-pockets
with disinfected pen
on sterilized paper.*

While in a poem like "Collage, I" he saves it up for the bitter driving scorn of the conclusion,

*If we had plague
Camus-style
and doctors searched for the
virus
there would be black-market
in rats.*

This austerity of sentiment, however, applies only to others. In dealing with himself and particularly his family he succumbs to a degree of sentimentality which, in a poem like "Pregnant in Raniket", can be embarrassing. It makes one realize that Daruwalla's forte is in the narrative-descriptive poem in which he crystallizes a moment from the past in poems such as "Carvak" or "Karna", or delineates in sharp pointed strokes, a character such as "Maulvi Sahib" or conveys the sense impressions of some place he has visited such as the Shiva at Badrinath or the more recent "Varanasi Vignettes". This gives a certain foundation to the remark made by a disillusioned admirer of Daruwalla who commented, "I am getting quite tired of Daruwalla's *Dargahs* and *Bhotias*; he does go on and on about them." That is, of course, a danger which a predominantly descriptive poet like Daruwalla will have to face. Too often we get the feeling that the strange vivid images that he flicks out for us in his poems are fascinating on account of the very scene they describe. There is no denying his ability to create vivid images but the very ease with which he does them gives them the appearance of a mechanical exercise. Everything seems to be grist to his mill of generalizations. In a poem to Martin Luther King, he writes an elegant ode of the sort a senile Poet Laureate may feel obliged to write to mark a solemn occasion. In "Karna" he very picturesquely retells a fairly well-known myth and quite amazingly concludes, "we can't forget you in a hurry" and of course there is quite a generous sprinkling of Bhotia women and nasty bandits to provide local colour. In fact, at the risk of sounding completely uncharitable, one begins to suspect why Daruwalla has been published so extensively abroad: his work contains all those elements which a foreigner would be thrilled to imagine as being 'so Indian'.

His use of language, too, is sharply honed to catch the attention with its hard consonants and frequent use of images that spurt and grind and tear, and words such as 'shards,' 'rape,' and 'marrow'. Yet one cannot deny that he is a master of the memorable phrase and even a random selection will

attest to this quality. For example, talking of Naxalites he describes their partiality for,

*Throats split from ear to ear
in bloody crescents*

Or in "Harang," he begins,

*The bamboo jungle grew around
our house
an arthritic forest
of tangled bone
spiked with leaf.*

Or, in "Fire Walking,"

*The fire bed is fanned with a
reed mat
and sparks fly as if the wind has
scattered
a concourse of glow worms.*

Or describing the Mujavir in "The Epileptic"—

*In low melodic murmurs he
intones
suras from the Quran
—kindled arabesques
that unwind from his mouth
like a thread of light*

Daruwalla makes frequent use of similes which have such a vitality of their own that one cannot decide whether they are the weakest or the strongest links in his poetry. Often they have such a distinct life of their own that they seem to get up and walk straight out of the poem, leaving it to hobble on till the next simile comes along to give it a helping hand.

This again reinforces the feeling that often in Daruwalla's poetry it doesn't matter what actually lurks behind the impressive barrage of words that he shoots out. Is it a pretense that he himself is aware of? In a poem entitled "Guru", in reply to a criticism made by the Guru who says,

*you can't project the dream
behind the word,
poetry behind pain*

Daruwalla observes,

*I would have told him, if he
had asked*

*I was content with visor, cuirass,
casque*

I wasn't a masquerade in the



Daruwalla is my name,
Cops and robbers is my game.
But being tough
Is not enough—
If in between I write a rhyme,
it can hardly be a crime.

proper sense

if you ripped it off, there was
nothing behind the mask.

A Clot in the Blood

"My life brings me closer to reality. I see people in the raw," said Keki Daruwalla who could see no reason why so many people found it odd that a policeman should write poetry. "Why do people imagine that a copy-writer, for instance, is better qualified to write poetry than a policeman?" he asked. "Every British poet must have fought in the war, killed and got wounded, but this does not mean that they became insensitive.

"Poetry must have an intensity, make a thrust, if it is to have a relevance to the times," continued Daruwalla who has neither the pale, fish-eyed look of the stereotype poet nor the metallic veneer of the standard policeman. Daruwalla who was initially not too anxious to discuss his poetry in the light of a 'Parsi' poet, was more like the perfect witness who is determined to answer all the questions put to him, precisely and correctly, without divulging anything more than the matter at hand.

"You can't write poetry in a vacuum," he went on. "In all branches of art you have to participate completely to take it seriously. Relevance to the life of others comes afterwards. People who write in vague terms about the moon and the stars are not sure of themselves. Calf loves and coffee house despairs sound false. These are juvenile preoccupations.

"People who ask me about my work, often say, 'How is your Hobby'" he commented with a wry laugh, implying that there was no question about it being a 'hobby'. "Poetry makes certain demands on you. Writing a poem is like a clot going out of the blood.

"Poetry is expression, self-expression and if it can achieve this, it leads to the greatest fulfilment." He composed, he said, both on the instant, which gave a kind of immediate fulfilment, and also more slowly, when he could savour

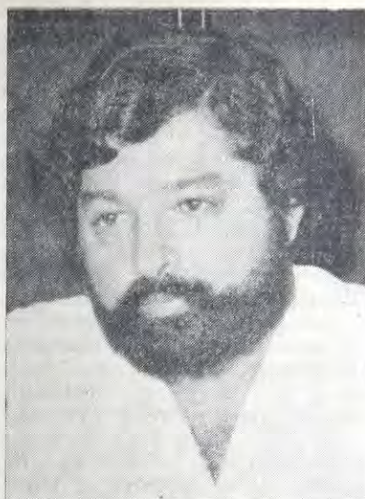
the delight of slow, deliberate, composition. "After seeing a demonstration of fire-walking I felt that I just had to sit down and write about it. I wrote two poems immediately. Other poems take more time.

"All art needs an audience" said Daruwalla, who seemed to feel his sense of isolation very keenly. "I miss the need of a feedback. In a sense it is like writing in a vacuum. You can't escape the fact that you are writing in an alien language. We are not coining any new words. This may be due to lack of a desire for experimentation.

"There is nothing obscure about modern poetry," said Daruwalla. "Modern poetry has a relevance to modern times." He felt that poetry written in other countries had a greater awareness of things outside the realm of their immediate experience. If not many people read poetry today it was more likely to be due to a permanent aversion to poetry that they would have developed after being fed "large doses of poetry in school and college as a kind of vitamin to keep the spirits in shape."

Having lived most of his life in the North, Daruwalla felt that he was to a large extent cut away from traditional Parsi influences and did not believe that these could have shaped his outlook on life very much. It is, however, curious to note here that out of the four poets considered, Daruwalla is the only one to have married within the community.

"I have been writing poetry, serious poetry that is, for the last six years," commented Daruwalla discussing whether his vision was essentially one of despair, "I think I may have reached the half-way mark. There is no reason to believe that it will not take another turn in the future." He felt that he saw before him a society that was entirely corrupt; "I want to face up to the reality of it. Normally I don't compromise," said Daruwalla with a hard ring in the tone of his voice, "I never make compromises either in my work or in my poetry."



Kersi Katrak Pointing to the Bone

If, as Paul Valery says, a poem is a sort of a 'machine' for stimulating a response that enables the reader to recreate the experience of the poet, then I can only record my frustration at not getting any response from Katrak's 'machines.' The frustration is not only that of being confronted with a machine that does not work, but of feeling that perhaps it does not work because one does not know how to make it work.

Katrak has two collections of poems to his name, *A Journal of the Way* and *Diversions by the Wayside*, while his more recent poems have been reserved for the pages of *Opinion*.

In the earlier poems there is a preoccupation with the 'bone' which is no doubt a perfectly normal, healthy preoccupation for poets to have. John Donne has immortalised the remains of his ideal lovers with the phrase, "a bracelet of bright hair about the bone", and more recently, John Berryman has brought in the sinister Mr. Bones with his unfortunate habit of turning up at the wrong time and asking the wrong question. Katrak's 'bone', however, is a well-behaved one; it does not talk back but lies "unwinking as bone will be." Herein lies the poet's difficulty. He feels instinctively that the answer to all life's problems lies in the bone, the only thing that prevails ulti-



mately; but seek as he may, the bone remains unresponsive. In "New Year's Poem" he writes:

*To mimic the simplicity
of stone
And find a metaphor for
sky and star,
To salvage coherence from
the sea
I must seek the hard interior
of my bone.
But I am young and cannot
find the words
That are my own*

He wrestles with the problem through the rest of the poem and then ends:

*My concern is with the bone
Hard and unwavering,
poised in form
As this poem is not.*

One cannot help but feel that the conclusion is frivolous in the extreme. The composition of the poem may have cost the poet all the customary agony required to produce a genuine work of art, but to equate his difficulty in finding the ultimate mystery in the bone, to his difficulty in writing the poem, is to reduce the whole problem to a game, where the poet seems to have chosen a nice spot (deserted beach) on an appropriate day to have gloomy thoughts (New Year's eve), to indulge in a bout of emotional calisthenics.

This impression was reinforced (though I admit somewhat unfairly since it was obviously not the case) in one of the best poems in the series, "The Shot Crow" where the poet shoots a crow, then agonizes over it while the crow lies half-dead, exposed to the curious eyes of relatives and friends, until the poet shoots it a second time, performs a suitable funeral and then composes an epitaph:

*This thing now deprived of
breath
Would point to the bone
each day and would remind
Of my own death.*

What could have been a more beautifully banal conclusion than this?

Yet, reading the second collec-

tion one begins to like, even long for, the simplicities of the first. At least there seemed a genuine urgency in his questioning of the bone and in a "Woman on the Beach" he did evoke, in clear uncompromising tones, the stark finality of the incident and his reaction to it. In *Diversions by the Wayside* his concerns seem indeed to be mere diversions, all his old forays into the bone of things are left aside, and we are treated to a well-documented and apparently amusing account of dysentery where we come across the sage observation that,

*Tropical infection can
Undo the better part of man.*

There are various private conversations recorded poetically with friends, a word of advice to fellow poets, a poem of mild reproach to an old flame and so on, where the tone is completely changed—more relaxed, more clever and less satisfying. Nevertheless, in a composition such as "Five Poems on Vanity," Katrak reveals that beneath the bantering tone, he has a painful awareness of the complexities of life and the inadequacy of his attempts to understand it. This awareness and the realization of his own vulnerability are what give a validity to Katrak's poetry.

In recent months Katrak's poems have been appearing in *Opinion* and the *Opinion Literary Quarterly* which he helps to edit, frequently in the guise of a *bikshu* writing under the *nom-de-plume* of Bikshu K. Since both the disguise and the mannerisms of Bikshu K. appear to be pretentious in the extreme, it is, one supposes, a joke meant for the benefit of close friends only. One should not grudge him this, since long ago Katrak warned:

*My real job is this:
A retrospective journal to
be kept precisely,
Precisely stating facts that
were internal,
Without objective shape, of
interest only
In part to my closer friends;
Without the local texture
and the real tone
That make for art.*



Advertising is my line
but
Versifying suits me fine.

Between the two I bide
my time
From selling soap to
things sublime.

No Eavesdroppers Please

Kersi Katrak manages to combine the rugged masculinity of a pocket-size Hemingway with the kindness of Santa Claus. Being the Managing Director of a well known advertising concern, he can, one supposes, sell any image. Katrak lives in a splendid garret furnished with all the necessities—paintings, rugs, books, *objets d'art*—that a person of impeccable taste might require. From his air-conditioned study, warmly lined with books, a person can look out at the paper boats floating in the sea below, and beyond that to the mainland, where on clear days he would even be able to make out the mountain tops from which Shivaji lit bonfires to announce a victory.

"Basically poets are talking to each other," said Katrak looking out of his window. "They are like the alchemists in Medieval Europe who kept alight little flares of knowledge through which they could understand each other. It is enough for poets to have these marks of recognition, these small landmarks. There may, of course, be a small audience, but they would in a sense only be eavesdropping."

Discussing the role of poetry in modern times, Katrak felt it was necessary to keep in mind the changing nature of the poetic tradition. He notes that, "in the early days of the bards, poetic tradition was a vital form, not only of entertainment, but of communication. After supper in the house of a great lord, the bards would start singing of the brave deeds of ancient heroes. This was followed by the period of Chaucer and Shakespeare when even the groundlings could read his poetry. Even at the time of Tennyson, poets were widely read. There used to be a hush in the house when he wrote his poem, for the next edition would be read by 10,000 people. But in the post-Baudelaire, I would even say, post-Eliot era, the audience has grown small.

"This is the age of mass media. You have all sorts of things happening in the 20th century. In the old days the village green continued unchanged for five cen-

turies. Now you have beamed impressions coming at you at a fast rate. Since the rapid growth of science in this century it is difficult to say whether Place and Time have any meaning. Since Freud and Marx, the very concept of man as a divine creation has ceased to have any meaning.

"It is only to be expected that poetic language has become... compressed ... disassociated... private ... difficult to follow. There has to be a compression of sense data.

"It is not possible to understand an equation in nuclear physics without some knowledge of the subject and the same is true about poetry. Most people are too lazy to make the effort to understand poetry. People are like sheep and like to be led. They don't want to form their own opinions so they let others make it for them. A reader should make as much effort as the poet to arrive at the truth of a poem.

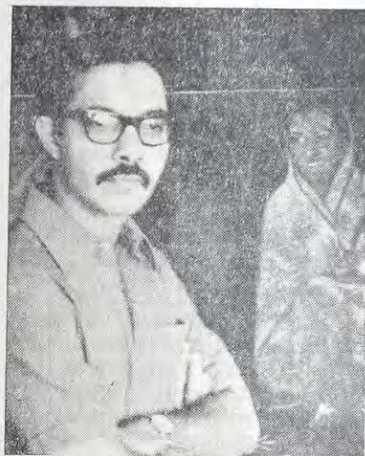
"Modern poetry is obscure," he continued, "because it is dealing with material which is obscure. It is not a children's book. It is not intentionally obscure, but reflecting an obscure universe."

Katrak was equally down-to-earth about his ideas of what a good poet should be. "A good poet is no different from a good carpenter. The craft of poetry and writing is a demanding thing. A poet has to make out of his life meaningful connections that may be of use. I treat the discipline very seriously." But, he added somewhat enigmatically, "any of the arts can only be regarded as a poor mystical substitute for the real thing."

Defining his feelings about being a Parsi, Katrak notes, "I was ordained as a priest but it is not my religion any more. The Parsis are a distinct community but they don't have a meaningful religion. What you have today are just the fragments remaining after Alexander burnt down the library at Persepolis. It is not possible to gather a coherent world view.

"I have very warm feelings towards the Parsis. As for myself, I treat the fact of my birth and

the Parsiness of it, as an accident. The fact that you are a Parsi is not an overriding factor, though naturally you can't ignore it either."



Gieve Patel

Postmortems, Anyone?

Gieve Patel's only collection of poetry is very simply entitled *Poems*. Though there are thirty poems inside, one gets the feeling that considered as a body of work, his performance is rather slight. This is not to imply that a poet is a sort of emotional heavyweight champion whose success depends on the number of pages he is able to weigh down with his thoughts. Patel makes his impact in quite a different way altogether. His poems are small, hard, pebbles that drop into the pools of the mind, causing ripples of feeling long after the initial impact has been forgotten.

He uses a simple straightforward approach that gains its force from the intensity of feeling behind it. Like Daruwalla, his profession (Gieve Patel is a doctor) plays an important part in his poetry, forcing him to face with calm professionalism, that which in reality, he seems to be recoiling from. It is this mixture of disgust and detachment, this forcing of himself to face some-

thing that he revolts against, that creates the tension in his poetry.

Several of his poems are centered round the hospital and deal with the eternal problems of birth and death, particularly death. For a doctor, whom one imagines as being more concerned with life, Patel the poet has a morbid fascination for death, as it appears in the hospital—cold, clinical and as impersonal as the slab on which the body is laid for postmortem. Even in those poems that do not deal directly with death, Patel is inclined to examine his subject with the routine methods prescribed for a post-mortem as for example in the first poem, 'On Killing a Tree' or the elegy for John Kennedy. Apparently like Flaubert, Patel seeks by his methodical dissection to lay the subject exposed before us, but as an autopsy invariably finds a conclusion, Patel's poetic exhumations just as inevitably impose a conclusion. In the poem 'On Killing a Tree' the verdict is given in the first line itself;

*It takes much time to kill
a tree.*

While in another poem the conclusion is framed into a question;
*Is there reason to believe
the students
Of Dacca University were
better than our own?*

Perhaps Patel is less conscious when exposing the delicate webs of feeling that bind one individual to another as in 'Nargol' or even 'Grandparents at a Family Meeting.' His technique of working is like the spider in his poem of that name, who sits still watching from the corner, weaving his poem out of

*Meaning matter
Distilled absorbed
Into mind and heart.*

His weapons are delicate irony best seen in small fragments as for example in the five line epigraph entitled 'Evening',

*Our English host was gracious
We were soon at ease;
Or almost:
The servants
were watching,*

in which he encapsulates an entire era ... the white man who ruled and the men whom he ruled, who

are now the new rulers and their servants who seem to be ruling them ... Or are they just puppets still, with the white man with his sinister graciousness still pulling the strings?

He has also a faculty for precise observation that saves him from sentimentalizing his experience for example in these lines from 'Public Hospital,'

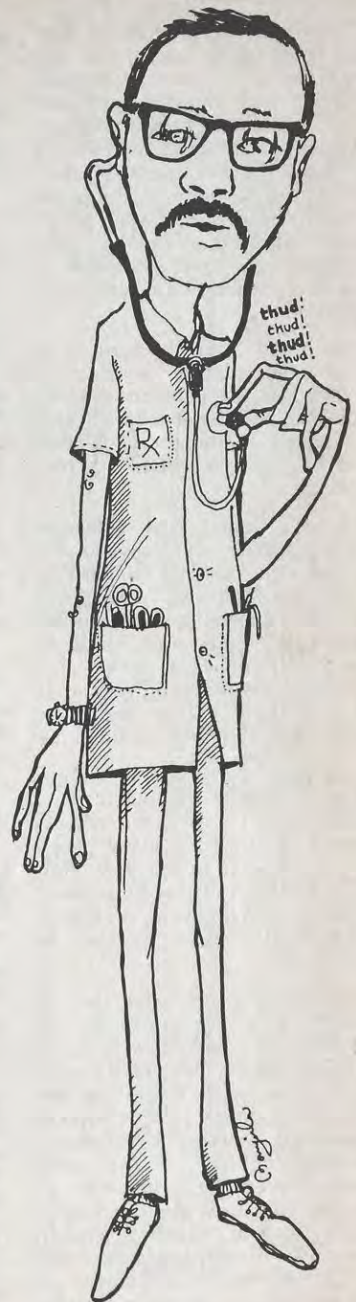
*everything shared
Moults skin after skin to
expose the gibbering flesh
of a need.*

Yet one can't help but be reminded of a remark made by Auden as to what he felt would make a good poet. He should like, commented Auden, "hanging around words, listening to what they say." With Patel one gets the curious feeling that he isn't much interested in listening to what the words say, so long as they listen to what he says.

The Doctor Prescribes a Poem

Gieve Patel is a young doctor who has at first glance all the solemnity of a general practitioner who has had to spend his entire life looking down at septic tonsils. The moment he smiles however he acquires the carefree light-heartedness of an undergraduate who has never heard of one. Patel lives in a flat overlooking the Hanging Gardens, around whose shaggy green head, birds can be seen wheeling around in slow practised circles. Patel talks slowly. There are pauses as he searches for the right word to express what he has in mind, while in the background, a clock ticks, fully aware of its own importance.

"Any poem is a knowledge of something which you did not know before, not necessarily anything earth shaking, but concrete and measurable... usually over a length of time such an accumulation of knowledge can change the course of human behaviour," said Patel with quiet conviction. "This is why totalitarian regimes are more frightened of artists and writers than any waving of flags or loud speeches. Because it is they who reveal the moments of truth that come out in a novel or



This is my stethoscope,
This is my heart,
One is for medicine,
The other, for Art.

a poem and it is completely unpredictable as to when they will make their impact.

"This may seem contradictory but a poem is an action like any other physical action. If a poem is clear, well thought out, purposive, logical and true, it will have changed something... first, in the poet himself... because if this does not happen... there is no poem. I mean changes in a very subtle sense—not to improve the traffic or grow more trees—but that it does change things I am completely convinced.

"With any form of art its function is tremendously varied. It is as varied as the number of poets. Each poet touches a different area in people's thinking. A different kind of poem will find its own person.

"I have found that whenever I've read a particular poem to anyone who understands English or is basically interested in poetry, it has never failed to communicate. There are kinds and kinds of poetry. It depends upon each individual. Whenever I've had to say something to that individual he has been able to understand me.

"Reading is a private experience, whereas reading in public is a different sort of experience. I suspect that a great many people have not tried to read poetry. Anything of weight cannot be acquired offhand. It is not an advertisement that can be whisked off the brain."

Patel is also an artist and has had his own one-man show. He has a curious technique of incorporating newspaper photographs into his paintings. Describing this, a critic writes, "A newsphoto reporting a function 'in honour of freedom fighters'... the Chief Minister presiding... might be the point of departure for a painting." Talking about these apparently unconnected circumstances that start him off, Patel notes, "A certain number of external situations can trigger off a poem. It cannot be purely accidental that an incident gets tangled in my subjectivity... I treat a child that is dying... I would not write about this unless in some way it reflected my own fears. An occurrence that happens outside is something

I am not afraid of. I do not mind incorporating it in my own work.

"As long as an external incident is also metaphorically transformed whether in a painting or a poem, it can be made to enrich the work. But each thing you pick up from the world—a child dying—a woman you love—has to be transformed into a poetic metaphor. It has to stand on its own. Any real poet does this."

Talking about himself, Patel described his family as being "fairly liberal" with his grandparents coming from a "rural Parsi village in the West Coast." Though he had married outside the community, Patel insisted that he was very much a Parsi and that he felt a "biological bond" with his family.

"You get this feeling, or communication if you like, which is not an intellectual communication, but a clan communication... or a brood communication," he clarified with a smile.

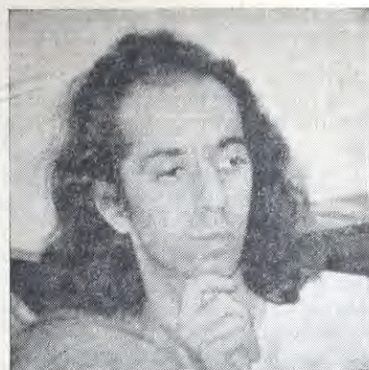
"I feel pretty strongly about being a Parsi without causing a flutter about it." Did he have any reservations about Parsi methods of disposing their dead? "Not the slightest," said Patel looking out. In the distance the birds were still circling around slowly.



Adil Jussawalla Last Stop, Land's End

Coming to Jussawalla's poems one has the satisfied feeling of dealing with a person who knows what a poem is supposed to do, of dealing with an expert who can examine the words, assess their value and place them in such a manner as to get the maximum effect out of them. His poems are like a kind of carefully assembled chiming clock which one can pull apart and reassemble without any damage being done to the mechanism.

Land's End, Jussawalla's only volume of poetry, was published in 1962, and, covering as they do some of the early years he spent out of this country they give us a neophyte's eye-view of England



and a tourist's eye-view of Europe. Quite often Jussawalla is only jotting down his impressions of some place he has visited, as in 'Westmoreland' where he notes, "Wordsworth's face is a country cottage. His village loves him" or a person he has encountered like the "drab expatriate Landlady Mendelssohn", but he records them with precision and clarity. He writes of Spring—frost—March—November, the stereotypes of poetry, but with the freshness of a person who is experiencing them for the first time. Reading Jussawalla one is reminded that poetry can be enjoyed also, instead of being agonized over.

Part of the enjoyment comes from the technical expertise he brings to his work. He has a Hopkinsesque feeling for words which is spontaneous in a poem like 'Land's End' but slightly self-conscious in phrases like;

*Single flame pods twin; twigs
frill to flowers;*

*Leaves unfurl through loam;
a greenshape spreads.*

Or in the poem about Tamilian servants,

*Dark skins serving dishes to
the sorrow*

*Sweat more night than grapes-
blood has;*

There is a frequent use of alliteration and carefully crafted rhyme schemes, all time-honoured devices which he uses with skill and wit. His best asset is perhaps the ease with which he gets into a poem and automatically sets the tone, which varies from poem to poem. In 'A Drinking

Song For The Ladies' for example, we get a rollicking, rambunctious tone, while 'Geneva', with smug puritanical complacency boasts,

*My fountain leaps a sixth of a mile in hope;
And Peace a turbine humming in the deep;*

quite blind to the irony that her emblems should be a stuffed eagle and a clawing clockwork bear. In this poem as well as the gay almost merry poem, 'What's the time' which is about the inexorable march of time, Jussawalla uses a refrain with good effect. On one hand the refrain echoes the macabre innocence of a nursery rhyme,

*The scythe and the pendulum
cut her together.*

and on the other hand creates the sense of urgency and desperation at the thought in the concluding line,

*Time and the Charioteer
whistling behind:
What's the time, mister, hey,
what's the time?*

He also displays a piquant sense of humour as for example in the 'Obits. from "The Times"'

*"Professor Dunbarton, on
leave from the University of
Osaka,
Leaving his letters to inspect
the Japanese fir on his lawn,
Was cut down by silent
samurai on casual horses
Before he could touch it."*

Or, in the epigrammatic conclusion,
*People in hot water cling
like tea.*

to the poem 'Tea in the Universities', which also reveals how easily Jussawalla has mastered the right tone to his poem.

Yet for all these fleeting pleasures in Jussawalla's poetry one cannot help but feel that something is missing from it. Could it be that this tendency to look outward, to keep his attention steadily on the object in front of him, is really an attempt to escape the difficulty of directing his gaze inwards? Or is it just as he notes in 'Seventeen' that his inspiration comes like the flames of the candles he speaks of, in brief spurts that do not endure, so that his poems can only be a series of vivid but momentary impressions—

*Things talk no more
though I listen,
and only a cold
assumption of arrogance
is mine.*

In retrospect, *Land's End* appears to be a peculiarly prophetic title to Jussawalla's only collection of poems, for it seems to delineate not only the range, but the limits of his work. With the collection he seems to have reached the brink of the land and standing at the edge of the ocean ahead appears to be contemplating it. The ocean draws itself to him with its force and turmoil, but it is also a destructive force that threatens to tear down the solid rock that he is standing on. There is no indication that Jussawalla ever left the safety of the land to embark on the more perilous journey ahead.

Poetry in a Vacuum

"This interview doesn't make sense," said Adil Jussawalla, distinguished editor—critic—writer, full time lecturer and occasional poet, over the telephone, explaining why he did not feel inclined to discuss his views about poetry. "What's the use of discussing my poetry just because I am a Parsi. I don't even consider myself a Parsi. In any case the fact that I may be purple or black has nothing to do with my poetry." He was also very busy, he explained, with the work involved in editing a book of contemporary Indian writings for Penguins but he promised to give the matter a further consideration.

It was perhaps as a result of this that Jussawalla was able, on a later telephone conversation, to put his objections in proper perspective. "I don't like this idea of creating subdivisions within subdivisions. If you must have a discussion on poetry it must be on some other basis than that all the poets are Parsis. There is no use discussing poetry in a vacuum. People are not interested in it. They feel a kind of contempt for poetry." It was also, he explained, more than ten years since his collection of poems had been published and since not many people would be familiar with his

(Continued on page 40, col. 2)



O, poetry's not for the common man,
Why you seek to enrich him I can't
understand.

This communalism I just cannot
bear—

When I'm labelled a Parsi, I tear
at my hair.

THE TIME BOMB

One of the occupational hazards of reporting on the Parsi community is the inevitable chain of reactions such coverage triggers off. So *Time*, the American news-weekly magazine, discovered with its innocuous enough article (see facing page) on the most explosive subject amongst Parsis today: the disposal of the dead.

Apart from the letters that flowed in damning and praising the magazine some individuals speculated that *Time* had been "inspired" to write the piece at the behest of those who have faulted the system of *dokhmanishini*. Dr. Minocher Karkhanavala, a scientist and Zoroastrian scholar questioned "on whose invitation and authority" James Shepherd of the *Time* Delhi Bureau came to Bombay to write the article; *The Jam-e-Jamshed* in an editorial alleged certain Parsis had the article published "in a foreign magazine under a pseudonym" and were in this way "trying to spread libellous views against our spiritual procedure... we request the Parsi Panchayat to meet the American Consul General in Bombay and enlighten him to the correct facts. They should also meet the Ambassador in New Delhi and ask him to protest on behalf of the Parsi community. If it is necessary to take the help of the Central Government to do this, even then the Parsi Panchayat should not hesitate to do it;" Nadir Mulla, Chairman of the Parsi Panchayat, in a lengthy letter to *Time* of which two paragraphs were published on the letters page, noted, "some Parsis who describe themselves as reformists have made some observations against this method (*dokhmanishini*) but their number is a microscopic minority;" one Trustee of the Pancha-

yat threatened to convene a public meeting to condemn *Time*. And several others joined in the chorus demanding the weekly's correspondent be recalled.

Indeed the sound and fury was of such magnitude that even a publicity shy photographer like Jehangir Guzdar (he refused to have his photo taken for publication in *Parsiana*), who photographed the picture which accompanied the article, showing pall bearers carrying a Parsi corpse into a *dokhma*, was forced to take up cudgels in defence of *Time*. "Do you really mean to suggest that *Time* would make its editorial pages available for propaganda purposes on behalf of a group of Parsis," he wrote in an angry letter to *The Jam-e-Jamshed*.

In an interview with *Parsiana* Associate Editor Feroza Paymaster, Gazdar said the article "was 'inspired' by letters to the editors of various papers by Parsis who had suffered unfortunate experiences with the *dokhmas*. One of these was surgeon Kersi Dastur's (letter) and another a short letter that appeared in one of the widely read English dailies about skyscrapers looking into the *dokhmas*. The *Time* Bureau Chief James A. Shepherd read a couple of these letters and was intrigued enough to suggest a story on the subject to *Time*'s editors. As a freelance photographer I have been associated with *Time* for many years and as I am a Parsi, it was only natural that Shepherd would ask me to help him research the story. I was also assigned by the editors to take photographs for the article.

"We went around talking to Parsis at random. We approached

leading doctors, businessmen, priests, lawyers and housewives. The entire gamut of opinion was expressed. People felt that the community was dying out because of Parsis getting married at a later age in order to have a fairly high standard of living, and because a large number emigrate. Girls said there is a shortage of eligible Parsi men, since a number of boys are abroad and out of reach; those here are below them mentally and therefore they prefer to marry outside the community. It became amply evident that the Parsis faced a crisis, that everyone was aware of it and very concerned. Statistically we are decreasing. The Parsi Panchayat maintains an accurate record of births, deaths and divorces and the gap between births and deaths is increasing. We are physically dying out, there is no question about it."

Accompanied by Shepherd, Gazdar photographed "two funerals, one in the afternoon, and another the following morning. On each occasion, we waited and watched for an hour after the body had been exposed. During that period of an hour, the bodies were untouched. In the morning, one vulture descended into the *dokhma* for about two seconds—he could hardly have eaten much in that time. The previous afternoon not one bird went down—they just sat there.

"All the pictures were taken from a sky-scraper (off Nepean Sea Road on a plot of land formerly belonging to a trustee of the Parsi Panchayat). The photograph which appeared in *Time* was shot in the morning and was probably used because it has feel and mood. I have no qualms about photo-

THE TOWERS OF SILENCE

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The choicest residential area in Bombay is Malabar Hill, where gleaming mansions and apartments house the city's elite. But the crown of the hill remains a jungle, thick with date palms and banyan trees, girded by two concentric walls that protect it from the encroachments of civilization. Inside the walls, amid the trees, are six low, stadium-like enclosures. Residents of Bombay know them as *dokhmas*—the "towers of silence." It is to these structures that the city's powerful community of Parsis bring the bodies of their dead, exposing them to the air so that scavenger birds can pick the corpses clean.

The origins of this bizarre practice are ancient. The Parsis, as their name implies, are descendants of Persians who fled the conquering armies of Islam in the 7th century. Like their Persian ancestors, they are Zoroastrians, followers of a myth-enshrouded religious prophet named Zoroaster who lived some six centuries before Christ. Zoroaster's exact teaching is obscure but, as passed

down by the Parsis, it is basically a vision of life as conflict between a spirit of goodness and light—Ahura Mazda—and a spirit of evil and darkness—Ahriman. The Parsis worship Ahura Mazda in the form of fire, one of the three sacred elements. Because the earth is also sacred (as is water), they choose to bury only the bones of their dead—after the flesh has been stripped away in the towers of silence.

Now both the tower ritual and the Parsi community itself seem to be on the decline. As high-rise apartments go up around Malabar Hill, it has become easier to catch a glimpse of what was once forbidden to all but the tower attendants—a view of the interior of the towers, where the dead are left as carrion. Visiting one of the new buildings, a horrified Parsi was able to see shrunk corpses stacked in grotesque piles inside one tower. After he complained, a wall was quickly built to screen the tower. But Parsis now realize the shortcomings of the ancient method. The vultures still come, along

with other birds, but for some unexplained reason scarcely touch the corpses these days. Many Parsis want the old custom changed.

First Cousins. Other traditions may have to change if the Parsi community is to survive. Indian Parsis number only about 100,000 worldwide; 65,000 of them are concentrated in Bombay. They are an uncommonly talented community. Parsis started twelve of India's 15 major modern industries; others helped lead India's independence struggle. But the community is in danger of dying out. Between 1966 and 1970 in Bombay, 5,195 Parsis died; only 3,828 were born. The religion does not accept converts. The faith is inherited, and Parsis marry late, producing few children. Moreover, only a man may pass on the faith to his children if he marries an outsider. A woman cannot. To wed within the faith, Parsis often marry first cousins. Generations of inbreeding have caused a high incidence of such hereditary illnesses as diabetes, epilepsy and certain heart diseases.

India's Parsi community has been further diminished by emigration to other countries, but that could possibly be the religion's salvation. In New York last week, when Parsis from the Eastern seaboard gathered to mark the spring equinox with a New Year's festival, many of the couples present were mixed marriages in which the Parsi father raises his children in the old religion. The Parsis of the New World (as well as a few in India) have also hit on a resolution of the burial problem—apparently without breaking the tenets of their faith—by cremating bodies. As they see it, the use of electric cremation ovens instead of flame does not violate the purity of the sacred element of fire.



Sketch of Time photo by Manjula Padmanabhan

graphing from a public building. I did not and would not go into Doongerwadi and deliberately offend the sensibilities of any religious group. I feel, though, that the ban on taking pictures is a political rather than a religious one. I have no qualms about going in, and would, if the Parsi Panchayat wanted me to take photographs."

From his perch atop the building, Gazdar saw "the funeral going up from the *Bunglis* right to the top of the hill where the last respects are paid before the body is taken in. Once inside they (the *nassesalars* and *khandias*) leave the body near the side of the wall where you can't see it but the birds drag the body while tearing at it and bring it into view. The construction workers on the building watch the proceedings as though it were a big *tamasha*. They know exactly what time the funeral will leave, where it will come from and where the body will be placed. As more high-rise buildings come up there won't be any point from where you can't see the bodies. How many walls are they (the Panchayat) going to build?"

"People are intent on reading insinuations, innuendos and malice into the story. One always fights blindly to protect what one believes especially when it is objectively shown to be otherwise. Probably what they fear is the fact that the long cherished beliefs can now be shown as false. You don't have to take another's word for it. People can see for themselves and decide, and that is what they fear—that you can make up your own mind.

"I think Nadir Mulla is right when he says that 'a microscopic minority' of the community have made observations against this method (of *Dokhmanashini*), but this 'microscopic minority' will soon become a majority once the blindfold is removed. Most people were totally unaware you could even look into the *dokhma*, and were quite aghast to learn that a controversy existed.

"To my mind, too much heated argument is going on unnecessarily. When more information is available to the community, the mode of disposing of the dead

may change or may remain, but then it will be an informed opinion. Mulla has also stated in his letter that 'it is sacrilegious to state that Zoroaster's teaching is obscure.' If it is not obscure I don't know what it is. To me, and to the vast majority, it is. I know more about Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Confucianism than Zoroastrianism. One does not have access to Zoroaster's teaching and no attempt is made to teach it. What Parsis know are the rituals. What does the religion say? I don't know.

"Parsis today don't know much about the Zoroastrian religion, but they still cling to it to preserve their ethnic identity—Parsiness. Zoroastrianism is not a living religion. Most of our rituals are adapted from the Hindus, and an average Parsi only knows the rituals and observes them because he has been taught to. We find that people today want to know more about religion, and what it means. You have faith that there is a supreme being who is concerned about and looks after you, and who you can turn to in times of stress. It satisfies the need to believe in a saviour. The Zoroastrian religion as practised today, does not offer this. Therefore those who do have the need for this faith find no comfort in our religion and either say they believe in all religions, or go to Sai Baba, visit mosques, or even convert. They feel the need for blessings, and have to try and look for it outside our religion.

"I don't consider myself a Zoroastrian. As a child one goes through the Navjote ceremony, and I suppose one does believe half-heartedly for a while. You do it because you are told to and at one time it was interesting. But then you start questioning—do I believe or not? It may be convenient to say one is a Zoroastrian, but then you realize you do have the courage to say you don't believe. The *sudra-kusti* mean nothing to me, so I don't wear them. Some people wear it (the *sudra*) as an under-shirt, but I don't wear an under-shirt either. The body means nothing to me. I feel that when one dies, one should donate the body to a hospital, and I might suggest very strongly

that after my death my body should go to a hospital but I would finally leave it to the wishes of someone close to me."

Gazdar has been a photographer since 1958, "I worked on advertising campaigns for a long time, till about three or four years back." He has worked for various magazines, text-books, encyclopedias, and travelogues. "I do a lot of work for tourism. I've done calendars, posters, and the commemorative postage stamp for Air-India to mark its 25th anniversary of overseas operations." The major project Gazdar has on hand, and on which he has been working for the past two years, is a book on festivals in India. "It's all in colour, and I'll be writing the text myself," he notes. Among the assignments he has done on Parsis, is a six page photographic feature on Zubin Mehta, the eminent maestro. "About seven or eight years back, I took a picture of Dasturji Dabu sitting inside a fire-temple. He did not raise any objection, but he said not to take any pictures of the *muktad* ceremony that was going on, since it was *Pateti* and there were many people present. This was for a story on Parsis in *Time*. I find most of the priests are reasonably intelligent, and have no objection to being photographed. They are interested in the religion more than in the customs." Gazdar also plans to do a picture book on Parsis "before they all vanish."

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Are there too many Fire Temples in Bombay?

Interviews by Feroza Paymaster. Photos: Farokh Reporter

Our regular interview feature with seven members of the community has been a controversial item. While readers praised us for opening our pages to the views of lay Parsis, they strongly criticized us for not also seeking the opinions of authorities in the particular field.

To meet this shortcoming we put our question, "Are there too many Fire Temples in Bombay?" to seven individuals who happen to be trustees of the Parsi Panchayat. As we anticipated that they would be reluctant to reply in their official capacities, we wrote that they may express their thoughts in their *individual* capacity and *not* as members of any trust, association, institution, committee, etcetera. Of the seven, four replied, all emphasising that they were doing so in their *individual* capacities and *not* as trustees. They are Erach Nadirshah, Dr. Aspi Golwalla, Shivaax Vakil, and P. P. Khambatta. Nadir Mulla, Lady Jehangir and Boman-Behram declined to give their views; Mulla stating it was not his "practice" to give interviews of any sort; Lady Jehangir stating through her secretary, she "regretted" not being able to give her views for publication and Boman-Behram saying he had not had a chance to write the answers and that we would "have to drop the matter."

The questions we asked were:

1. Do you feel there are too many fire temples in Bombay?

2. Why do you feel the way you do?

3. Do you feel the community can support the present number of *agiaries*?

4. Would you actively try to increase or decrease or leave static the numbers?

5. Would you be in favour of converting *agiaries* into schools, hospitals, offices or residential housing?

6. Would you rather the *agiaries* were sold off and the money used for other purposes?

7. Do you think our *agiaries* are well managed?

8. How do you feel we could attract more people to the fire temples?

Of the four, three felt the number of fire temples in Bombay was too large, one felt there were "not too many." We print below the text of their replies (in order of arrival) with minor editing.

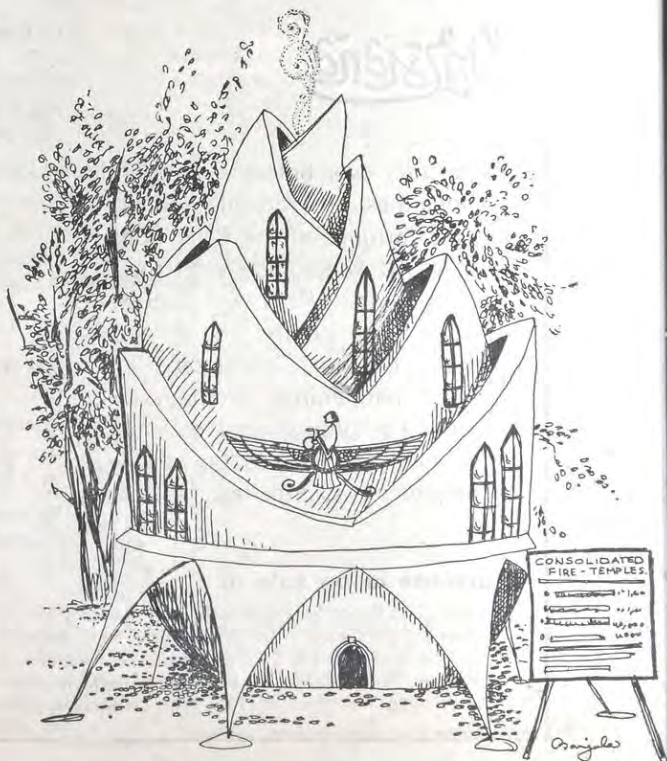
Dr. Aspi Golwalla

1. Yes, I do feel that under the present circumstances the number of Fire Temples in Bombay is too large.

2. For more than one reason: (a) The Parsi population has migrated from certain residential areas such as Mazagaon, where there are two *agiaries*. (b) Some of the *agiaries* are not able to maintain themselves from the Trust income and have to appeal for funds annually from Parsi charities and the public. (c) Because of the paucity of funds in some *agiaries* the *mobeds* working there do not get adequate salaries to meet the rising costs of living and have to live from hand to mouth.

3. No. The community should direct its attention to its prime need namely housing, and a number of Trusts with substantial annual income should pool their efforts in this direction.

4. I have expressed my views in favour of merging some of the *Adrans* from public platforms on more than one occasion. I have also tried to tackle the problems to some extent although without success so far. On July 21, 1969, in my individual capacity, I wrote to the Trustees of the F. N. Patel's *Agriary* Trust suggesting that in view of the dwindling funds of the Trust (the Trustees had put in an appeal for donations in the Press), and in view of the very poor attendance at the *Agriary*, the *Adran* be merged with another and the valuable land be utilised for residential flats for Parsis. On 7th August the Trustees wrote to say that the *Agriary* had been in existence for 125 years and suggested that I should try and get the Parsi Panchayat to build a new *agriary* at one of the newer Parsi colonies. This would have meant a lot of expense and so I did not do anything about it. About two years ago I had more than one meeting with one of the Trustees of the Vacha *Agriary* situated on Dadabhoy Naoroji Road and hence in a very prominent locality. The request was to shift the *Atash Padshah* to a new place and utilise the building for housing the J. J. College of Commerce. I even took the Trustee to



List of Agiaries in the City & Suburbs of Bombay

(The words "ATASHBEHRAM", "AADRAN" and "DADGAH" indicate respectively I, II and III Grade of Fire Temples)

Note : (The names in parenthesis indicate the short names by which the fire temples are commonly known)

Locality	Names of Fire Temples with Addresses	Locality	Names of Fire Temples with Addresses
Andheri	Ardeshir Patel Darehmeher, Andheri (Patel Agiari)	Grant Road	Sorabji Hormusji-Ranji, Corner of Grant Road, Bombay 7 (Panji Agiari)
Baharkote	Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy (Dadga), Alahibag, (Pydhone) (Alahibag Agiari)	"	Dorabji A. Jamsina or Mithaiwalla, Chikalwadi, Bombay 7 (Mithaiwalla Agiari)
Bandra	Nasserwanji Ratanji Tata, Hill Road, Bandra (Tata Agiari)	"	Merwanji Maneckji Patel (Mehlla Patel), Balaram Street, Grant Road, Bombay 7 (Mehlla-Patel Agiari)
"	Aderji Kaikhushru Panthaki, Near Bandra Station, Turner Road (Panthaki Agiari)	Jogeshwari	Bai Motlibai Wadia Adaryan, Malcolm Baug, Jogeshwari, Bombay 60 (Originally, Bai Motlibai Wadia Agiari of Pitha Street, Fort)
Byculla	Bomanji Merwanji Mevawalla, Near Victoria Gardens (Mevawalla Agiari)	Karelwadi	Cowasji Behramji Banaji, (In Banaji's Atash-behram) Junction of Thakordwar and Queens Road, Bombay
Chowpatty	Mody Sorabji Vachhagandhi, Hughes Road, Bombay 7 (Vachhagandhi Agiari)	Khetwadi	Cowasji Maneckji Ashburner, Agiari Street. Near Golpitha, Bombay 4 (Ashburner Agiari)
Colaba	Panday Sanatorium (Dadga) Colaba, Bombay 5	"	Pallonji Khurshedji Cama, Cama Baug, Girgaon Road, Opp. Krishna Cinema (Cama Baug Agiari)
"	Jijibhoy Dadabhoy Agiari, Pilot Bunder, Colaba, Bombay 5	Mahim	Edulji Rustomji Soonawalla, Mahim Bazar, (Soonawalla Agiari), Mori Road, next to Contractor Baug, Mahim, Bombay 16
Dadar	Naoroji Cowasji Narielwalla, Naigaum Road, Dadar, Bombay 14 (Narielwalla Agiari)	Marine Lines	Jamshedji Dadabhoy Amaria or Sodawaterwalla, Junction of 1st Marine St. and Queen's Road, Bombay 2 (Sodawaterwalla Agiari)
"	Rustomji Nasserwanji Rustomfaramna, Parsi Colony, Dadar, Bombay 14 (Rustomfaramna Agiari)	Mazagaon	Framji Nasserwanji Patel, Gunpowder Road, Mazagaon, Bombay-10
Dhobitalao	Rustomji Sorabji Bharucha & Indawalla	"	Nanabhoy Jamshedji Sapla (Readymoney) Gunpowder Road, This Agiari was closed down and Adaraan shifted as Dadga to Wadiaji's Atashbehram at Dhobi Talao
"	Or	"	Anjuman, Dockyard Road, Bombay-10
"	Avanbai Ardeshir Khurshedji Wadia, Trinity Street, Dhobitalao, Bombay 2 (Indawalla Agiari)	Parel	Dadabhoy and Mancherji Pestonji Wadia, Lalbaug, Bombay 12 (Wadia Agiari)
"	Hormusji Maneckji Bhiwandiwalla; Adjoining Anjuman's Atashbehram, Girgaum Road, Bombay 2 (Bhiwandiwalla Adaraan)	Tardeo	Mancherji Bomanji Sethna, Tardeo Road, Bombay 7 (Sethna Agiari)
"	Hormusji Bomanji Wadia Adaran (In Wadiaji's Atashbehram) Princess Street, Bombay 2 (Wadia's Adaraan)	"	Behramji Cowasji Batliwalla, Tardeo Road, Bombay 34 (Batliwalla Agiari)
Fort	Nasserwanji Hirjibhoy Karani, Cusrow Baug, Causeway Road, Fort, Bombay 1 (Karani Agiari)	"	Dhunapatel-Boyce, Tardeo Road, Bombay 7, (Boyce Agiari)
"	Nasserwanji Maneckji Petit (Fasli) New Marine Lines, Bombay 1 (Petit or Fasli Agiari)	"	Shapoorji Sorabji Kappawalla, Cowasji Jehangir Colony, Tardeo, Bombay 34 (Kappawalla Agiari)
"	Khershedji Maneckji Shroff, Police Court Lane, Fort, Bombay 1. (Shroff Agiari) (Adaraan removed to Jamshedpur)	Walkeshwar	Sorabji Khurshedji Thuthina, Walkeshwar, Bombay 6 (Thuthi Agiari)
"	Banaji Limji, Banaji Lane, Fort, Bombay 1 (Banajini Agiari)	Warden Road	Hormusji Dadabhoy Saher, Saher's Compound, Warden Road, Bombay 26. (Saher in Agiari)
"	Maneckji Naoroji Sett, Bazaar Gate Street, Fort, Bombay 1 (Maneckji Sett Agiari)		
"	Godawara Agiari or Gamadia Agiari, Kawasji Patel Street, Fort, Bombay 1 (Sirni Agiari)		
"	Mancherji Khurshedji Langdana, Gola Lane, Fort, Bombay 1 (Godiwalla Agiari) or (Langdana Agiari)		
"	Ardeshir Dadabhoy Dadiseth, Dr. Dadabhai Naoroji Road, Fort, Bombay 1 (Dadisethni Agiari)		
"	Pirojbai widow of Dadabhoy Maneckji Vachha, Dr. Dadabhai N. Road, Fort, Bombay 1 (Pirojbai Vachha Agiari)		
Girgaon	Aslaji Bhikhaji near Congress House, Vithalbhai Patel Road, Girgaon, Bombay 4 (Aslaji Agiari)		
Gowalia Tank	Soonabai Hirji Jivanji Readymoney, Gowalia Tank Road, Bombay 7 (Soonajini-Hirji Agiari)		

ATASHBEHRAMS IN BOMBAY

Dhobitalao	Anjuman Atashbehram (Near the Junction of Princess Street and Girgaum Road, Bombay 2)
"	Wadia's Atashbehram (Near the Junction of Princess Street and Girgaum Road, Bombay 2)
Fanaswadi	Dadabhoy Nasserwanji Dadiseth's Atashbehram (Kadmi) Fanaswadi, Bombay 2 (Dadiseth Atashbehram)
Karelwadi	Cowasji Behramji Banaji's Atashbehram (Kadmi) Junction of Thakorewar and Queen's Road, Bombay 2 (Banaji Atash-behram)

List Supplied by Parsi Panchayat Office, Bombay

the Doongerwadi lands where the late Mr. Manek Mistry had chosen a site for the *Agiary* including a plot for a structure for housing the *mobeds*. The Trustee approved of the site but subsequently some Dasturji sahebs expressed their opinion that it would not be permissible to have an *Adran* anywhere on Doongerwadi land. My subsequent suggestion to the Trustee of the *Agiary* to shift it to the new colony at Parel was not acceptable to him.

5. I would give first and only preference to the construction of residential buildings at such sites since this is a very important and urgent need of the community. We have enough hospitals considering the size of the community and one day if they are nationalised the property and funds will be acquired by the Government.

6. Yes, where possible there can be no objection to selling the *agiary* land and getting a good value for the same. The money could be utilised for the construction of buildings. If the Trust has no land of its own, the Parsi Panchayat can offer lands on very reasonable terms (this has already been done with more than one Trust). I have been informed that the Government of India wanted to purchase the Fanaswadi *Atashbehram* site at a very large price (the *Atashbehram* is completely surrounded now by non-Parsis) but the Trustees refused and thus a large sum of money was lost to the community.

7. How can an *agiary* be well managed when there are not enough funds for *kathi* and other essential requirements, let alone painting and repairs?

8. This is difficult to answer. I see a number of Parsis, who, when they come as patients do not wear the *sadra* and *kusti*. Perhaps the zest for Religion is not what it used to be. There are certain *agiaries* like the "Dadyseth" at Fort, or "Aslaji" off Lamington Road where Zoroastrians flock throughout the year; there are others which do not attract more than a handful of devotees per day.

Aspi Golwala

Shiavax Vakil

1. Yes, in my considered opinion, looking to the Parsi population of Bombay, the number of *buildings* of Fire Temples should be reduced.

2. The reason why I feel that they should be reduced is that there are certain Fire Temples which are more or less private in character inasmuch as the public hardly patronises them. Just as there is the luck of an individual, equally there is the luck of Temples whether they are Parsi Fire Temples or Hindu Temples or Muslim Durgahs or Christian Churches.

3. In my view with the lapse of time and with increasing inflation we will not be able to support the present number of *agiaries*.

4. In my view there should be an effective *amalgamation* of a number of *agiaries*. I am not in favour of increasing the number of *agiaries* nor in favour of decreasing the 'Sacred Fire'. I am of the view that it is more economical to 'house' two, three or four Sacred Fires within the precincts of one building.

5. I am not in favour of converting *agiaries* into schools because no *agiary* as it exists is fit enough to be converted into a school. It is more difficult to run a *Communal* educational Institute without Government grant than an *agiary*. I am not in favour of converting *agiaries* into communal hospitals. This is justifiable only in a society where there are more sick persons than healthy ones. But I believe that I am talking to a Community which has not reached this nadir of depravity. Not yet. In a society where there is still the play of healthy hearts and virile intellects, there is certainly a need for temples and worship. And in these Houses of God, it is not the intricacies of their design, elaboration of the ritual nor the splendour of gold and wealth exhibited that contribute to their essential success. I am not in favour of converting them into offices because 80% of the *agiaries* are not situated in office areas. I am equally not in favour of 'converting' them into residential houses. What I am rather anxious to do is to obtain the maximum advantage of the precincts either by selling or by leasing the premises, some of which are situated in prominent and strategic areas and would fetch extremely handsome prices. This would also partially answer query No. 8.

6. If the premises of the *agiaries* are sold and/or leased, out of the funds you can, apart from maintaining *agiaries* and Priests in a more efficient and affluent manner, utilise substantial amounts for other charitable purposes like housing the homeless. Is not a sacred fire burning in the heart of each and every human being?

7. I do not think that in respect of any *agiary* there is a wilful default or breach of trust on the part of Trustees, but callousness and indifference—yes. There are *agiaries* with substantial funds at the disposal of the Trustees which can be managed in a better way having surplus funds or lands which can be utilised or developed in a better manner.

8. More and more people can be attracted if we explain properly through our Dasturs and leaders the basic philosophy of fire and the basic philosophy of prayers viz., silent communion between a man and His Creator. It should be remembered that Fire Temples are neither sweetmeat shops nor places of fashion parade.

Erach Nadirshah

Erach Nadirshah

1. By "fire temples" you do not specify whether you refer to *Atash Behrams* or *agiaries*. Your first question therefore appears to refer to fire temples

in general and if you mean thereby *Atash Behrams*, then I would say there are not too many *Atash Behrams* but if you mean *agiaries* or *Adarians* in Bombay then I would say that compared to our population which is gradually dwindling instead of increasing there are too many such fire temples. For instance in the Tardeo Area there are as many as five *agiaries* including one on Gowalia Tank Road which is not far from Tardeo Road.

2. The number of worshippers visiting the *agiaries* is dwindling for a variety of reasons such as want of time in these days of hard life for existence, high cost of living, the high cost of sandalwood, the high cost of performing ceremonies, but the most important factor is that the real purpose of a Fire Temple is not properly understood nor implemented. I have explained this in more detail in the last portion of my note. Naturally, therefore, the workload in many *agiaries* is not what it should be. There are, however, some popular *agiaries* such as Dadyseth, Banaji, Aslaji etc. where worshippers go in large numbers as compared to other *agiaries*, though even in these popular *agiaries*, worshippers do not flock in as large numbers as they used to, before.

3. It depends on the Trust Deed of each *agiar* and the endowment funds provided. If there are no endowment funds and if the *agiar* does not come under the popular category then I do not think one should expect the community to support the same.

4. If the *agiar* comes under the non-popular category, then it is for the trustees of that *agiar* to give serious thought to their problems; they should study the various terms of the Trust Deed and even approach a Court of Law for the best utilization of the money released. As stated in the answer to an earlier question, I am not in favour of establishing and consecrating a new *agiar*.

5. In case it is decided by the trustees of that *agiar* to close down the same, then the best use of the released plot would be to build Residential Quarters for the poor and lower middle class Parsis. To the question of utilising the released plot for Schools, Hospitals or offices, my answer is definitely NO.

6. I have already expressed my views in the above answer.

7. Management is entirely the affair of the trustees of an *agiar*. It is only a matter of opinion whether an *agiar* is well managed or not.

8. The religious education of our children is nowadays neglected. The children are not taught by their parents the basic principles of our ancient Religion, nor are they taught to have complete faith in *Ahura Mazda*, the Creator.

Our Religion only lays down the code of living a good and fruitful life. It is a link which unites not only man to man but man to God. Religion teaches us to be humble, to be kind and merciful and to be of selfless service to others. If faith in *Ahura Mazda* is created more people will go to *agiaries* and *Atash Behrams*.

If it is decided by the Trustees of a particular *agiar* to close it down, then their funds should be diverted to another *agiar* to be utilised for the objects of the Trust.

To attract more people to Fire Temples there are two more points I should like to mention as they relate to Fire Temples and are of utmost importance.

One is that we should realise that our Fire Temples, whether *Atash Behram* or *Agia*, are not just places where a Zoroastrian may bow to the Fire and offer sandalwood and incense. It is of the utmost importance that the significance of Fire as taught by our Prophet Zarathushtra should be correctly understood and should guide us in our daily life. If one does not become a better person at the time of leaving the Fire Temple than one was when one entered it, the full purpose of going to the Fire Temple is not achieved. Unfortunately, Fire Temples are looked upon by most Zoroastrians as being a place where Priests chant some words in the name of prayers, which are not understood and where ceremonies are performed the significance of which is not explained. Fire Temples must be places of spiritual force from which a Zoroastrian can receive the right inspiration, moral and spiritual.

The second point which is equally important is that the majority of the priests attached to Fire Temples, in most cases may not be aware of the correct principles of the Zoroastrian religion and the true purpose of running a Fire Temple. They think that their duty ends if they chant certain words in the name of prayers and go through the outward formality of the ceremonies. The main idea, that a priest is the shepherd of his flock and that he must devote time and labour to teaching the right principles of religion whereby people's faith may be strengthened, never dawns upon them nor is this taught to young priests under training. *Mobeds* should be competent guides to *Behdins* in times of difficulty.

To my mind the real purpose of running Fire Temples is not served unless these two points mentioned above are properly attended to and set right.

Erach A. Dastur

P. P. Khambatta

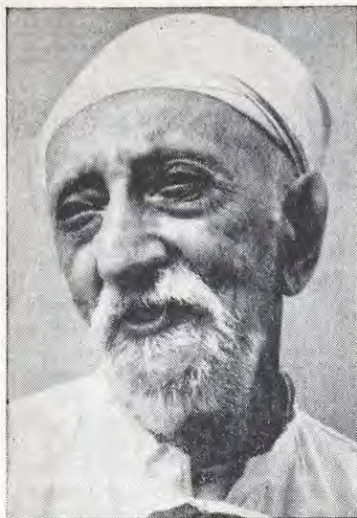
1.2.3. I do not think that there are too many fire-temples in Bombay, though I do feel that a few are situated in places where little use is made of them.

4.5.6. I do not think that there is any need to add to the number in Bombay. Where however the fullest use is not being made of a particular fire-temple, it would be in the community's interest to divert its funds to establishing schools or hospitals or for providing housing if the terms of the trust permit such an application of its funds or an order can be obtained from the court for such change.

7. In the main, yes.

8 The only way I can think of is by making Parsis better Zoroastrians.

P. P. Khambatta



Dhunjishaw Nalladaroo, 80, Buoyvala, Mody Sohrabji Bomanji Vatchagandhi Agiary

"So many are not necessary. The trusts support them, but today sandalwood, wood, servants, *mobeds* all cost so much more, that it is difficult to maintain them. People are not willing to be trustees because of this. Still, most *agiaries* are well managed. Because of bad times, I find more and more people are coming now. Both children and grown ups. We can attract them by telling children that they will pass in their exams, do well, be successful. We can tell older people they will get jobs or do well in business."

Since he has a 24-hour duty at this *agiary*, Ervad Nalladaroo doesn't go often to other *agiaries*. When he does he usually buys

sandalwood "worth 15 to 20 paise. God does not require much. I don't give the *dasturjis* anything, but I do give something to deserving servants occasionally." In his own *agiary* he finds that people usually buy sandalwood worth 25 paise to Rs. 5 and put five paise to Rs. 5 on the *buoy*. "It depends on what each one can afford. I don't take a salary. Just accept what's on the *buoy*, and what people give me."

If the *agiaries* were converted into schools, offices or hospitals Nalladaroo says he wouldn't mind though "those who established the *agiaries* and their families would feel offended." He adds, however, "they mustn't sell *agiaries* at all."



Dhun Katrak, 49, Inspector, Oriental Fire and General Insurance Company

"Of course there are too many. We see them in practically every street and lane. They are not even exclusively situated as sacred places should be, but are often in commercial centres. I think there must be at least 60 in the whole of Bombay."

Regarding their management she says "Who knows? We hardly see the management part. They are well looked after though." She notes that people today do not frequent fire temples as much as before, and says "if the High

Priest were to give lectures or tell more about our religion then more would be interested." Ms Katrak herself goes about three or four times a year on good occasions. "Sandalwood is so expensive that I usually buy some two rupees worth and put 25 paise on the *buoy*." However, she feels, "If you go to the fire temple, what is the point of going unless you put sandalwood." Regarding selling the *agiaries* for charitable purposes she says "Even if the trustees want to, they cannot do anything. Will the trusts allow it?"



Rusi Mahudawala, 33, Officer, Follow-Up Dept. Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India

"Yes I do think there are too many. It is a question of demand and supply, most Parsis don't take time off to pray at *agiaries*, they pray at home. On festive days the fire temples are overcrowded, but otherwise I don't think there is much demand." Mahudawala does not think there is any way in which more people could be attracted to the fire temples. "You cannot compel anyone to change his basic concepts." However, he is against converting fire temples into charitable institutions. "They provide employment for priests, who could not have other jobs"

and if they were converted, "there would be unused man capacity. Can you provide employment to the priests? What happens to them?"

"You do not count the number of times you visit the *agiaries*" says Mahudawala. He goes twice or thrice a year on birthdays, *Pateti* and other such occasions. He usually buys sandalwood worth from one to five rupees and places one rupee on the *buoy*. From what he sees, he feels that the *agiaries* "appear to be reasonably managed."

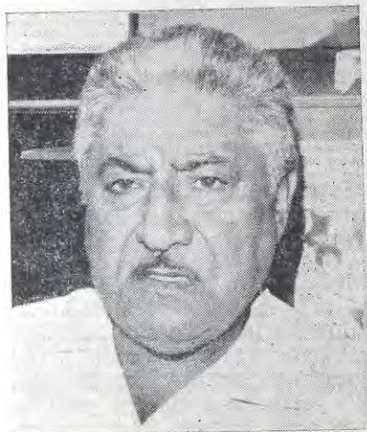


Mithi Banaji, 27, Receptionist, State Bank of India

"I don't think there are too many, there are probably about 40. The population of Parsis in Bombay is quite spread out, and they should have ready access to the *agiaries*. However, those who are really interested would go a hundred miles (to visit an *agiar*) so even if there were less it wouldn't matter." Mithi supposed that the *agiaries* "are supported by Trusts. Some *agiaries* are well managed, others are not." She feels "Dasturjis do not devote enough time to prayers," and also that "there's room for improvement" as far as cleanliness is concerned.

Mithi goes to the *agiaries* about

five to six times a year, "on auspicious days. You don't have to go to the fire temple to pray, God dwells in the hearts of people. Why should you force or attract people? They should go willingly." She usually buys sandalwood worth Rs. 2 and places 25 paise on the *buoy*. Both of these she considers as "customs we have been following since years, doing away with which would mean doing away with the fire temple." Mithi feels the *agiaries* cannot be converted into other institutions. "Charitable institutions are very essential but not at the cost of fire temples, except maybe as a last resort."



Jamshed Kermani, 52, Assistant Purchase Officer, Associated Breweries and Distilleries

"I feel there are too many, about 80 to 85, some of which are well looked after. Everyone's getting modernised, people today are not fond of praying or going to the fire temple, and there is no way to attract them. It depends on the wish and will of the individual. How can we attract them? We cannot decorate the fire temples from outside." Kermani himself goes to the fire temple daily. "I get up early in the morning, and have nothing to do, so I go to pay homage to God. If I had the time, I would go more often." Kermani usually buys sandalwood for 30 paise and places five paise on the

buoy. The latter he considers "a type of charity to the dasturjis who have no other income. I would prefer to give even the 30 paise I spend on sandalwood to the dasturjis but since it is customary to buy sandalwood, I do it."

Kermani would have nothing against converting *agiaries* into other institutions if the need arose, but he feels "the orthodox Parsis wouldn't like it." He would prefer it "if the lower portion remained an *agiar* and upper portions were constructed and used for housing."



Yasmin Billimoria, 26, Secretary to Information Officer, Indo-American Chamber of Commerce

"There are too many. I'm not sure of the number but I think it is about 70." While some "are more popular, a number of them are hardly visited." However Yasmin feels that there is no way to attract people. "If they want to go and pray to God they go, why should we give them an incentive?" The *agiaries*, she says, are supported by Trusts, and although some of them are well managed, "certain others do need funds. They should be amalgamated so that there is more efficiency."

"I go to the fire temple twice or thrice a month. I have been brought up that way. Of course

you go when you feel like going, and on good occasions." She usually buys sandalwood worth Rs. 1.25 to Rs. 5, and places 10 to 30 paise on the *buoy* "depending on the occasion. Why not give money to God, and to the people who look after the upkeep of the fire temple? How would the fire temples exist otherwise?"

Yasmin feels that the *agiaries* can be used as charitable institutions, but "they should be used to the advantage of the poor and needy." If the *agiaries* can be sold she feels "we can sell some and use the money for needy Parsis."



Pic. by Farokh Reporter

THREE ACES

At his uncluttered desk in a quiet, air-conditioned room of *The Statesman* Office, Burjor Patel is closely akin to a queen bee with three separate hives. The Bombay manager for the entire *Statesman* group of newspapers he simultaneously shoulders the responsibility for *The Junior Statesman*; he is at the hub of the Indian National Theatre, having acted in and produced innumerable plays on the Gujarati stage; and recently, as the culminating point of a long career in the advertising world, he was elected President of the Advertising Club of Bombay.

"I've always been connected with ads," says Patel. Starting as a space-seller on *The Jam-e-Jamshed*, where he worked for twelve years, he graduated to assistant advertising manager for the *The Times of India* and three years later joined *The Statesman*. Now as President of the 900 member Advertising Club, Patel

finds himself in the unique position of mediating between the advertising agencies, their prospective clients and the media through which they advertise.

"Our advertising agencies have been living in their own dream world uptil now," says Patel. "This shortage of newsprint is a blessing in disguise. It has definitely hit the advertising industry badly, but our entire nation is in crisis, production is in low key, so where is the question of advertisements? The benefit of the shortage has been that with the thinner paper there is not enough space for ads and we have had to develop other outlets, such as the film media. Of course if the newsprint situation improves suddenly the newspapers will lose because there won't be anyone to advertise with them." As to the losses of the advertising agencies he feels that they "have brought it upon themselves." Most agencies only charge a fifteen

per cent commission on each advertisement, which barely covers the expense of the services rendered to produce the advertisement. "They live on a very marginal economy so that when the crisis comes they can't survive."

It all began with the newsprint shortage, for which Patel blames the Government. "We should have bought newsprint on a long term basis. The trouble started in America, because of the Water-gate issue—the daily newspapers doubled their requirements of paper overnight. And they got priority because their demand was steadier. All the Asian countries are in this problem because they were all spot-buying. We have decided to start long-term buying but now, of course, there is a world-wide shortage of newsprint."

Patel has been with *The Statesman* for over five years. "Because *Junior Statesman* is popular in Bombay people connect me more with *JS*," says the man who handles a crore of advertising revenue per year from Bombay for the *Statesman* group of papers. "*JS* would only be a drop compared to that." Despite the fact that the magazine has been very successful in Bombay, which in turn has made it possible to circulate it in places such as Goa and Tamilnadu, it still runs into a loss of one lakh a month. "Every magazine has a break-even point. A magazine like *JS* which uses quality printing techniques and paper has a much higher break-even point than one like, say, *Sportsweek*. Yet they sell at the same price."

As for his years on the *Jam-e-Jamshed* Patel recalls, "I thought it was great when Adi (Marzban) asked me to join him on *Jam-e-Jamshed* because then I would be close to him and the theatre. I think I gave the paper an image. It used to be a paper to read the obituary column in. It was treated as a bi-lingual daily by the advertisers because the products we advertised would be the same sophisticated products which go into *The Times of India*. The *Jame* goes to the affluent members of the community but not to the young in spite of all my trying to cater to them." That was the time when both Gujarati and English were spoken in Parsi homes and when Gujarati was taught in many

English medium schools. "It was the best time to try and get the young interested," he notes. "Now it is too late. Over the years the circulation has been dropping, and as this generation gives way to the next, there will be progressively fewer people who will be able to read the paper."

After finishing his studies in Elphinstone College, Patel opted for law "because I dreamt that the law court was like the theatre," said Patel. He had already been working with Marzban in plays while in college, "the theatre had become a passion. For fifteen years I was virtually Adi's right hand man." Patel and his wife, Ruby, played in most of the leading roles, helping in the script, direction and the other details of production. "I believe Adi is one of the geniuses of the theatre world both as a director and a writer, but writing all his own plays and directing them himself does not do him a service. He should allow someone else to interpret his plays, otherwise the style tends to stagnate. We were all typecast puppets in his hands, playing tailor-made roles." The fact that some of Marzban's troupe have broken away, "has probably helped him indirectly," by forcing him to produce plays off the beaten track such as *Ah, Norman!* using newer

faces and approaches. Patel does not feel that the Marzban plays ridicule the Parsi community too much or that they place it in a derogatory light. "His plays are not so bitter as to hurt the community. His audiences are sophisticated enough to appreciate the plays purely as entertainment. It's a great thing to be able to laugh at oneself. Everyone knows that the plays are exaggerated."

"We had some differences of opinion in theatre," Patel says in explanation for his having left Marzban to form a Parsi troupe in the Indian National Theatre (INT) group. "I wouldn't call our plays Parsi plays," he says, "they are more bedroom comedies and farces. All our plays are adaptations," mostly taken from foreign productions. "We get permission to produce a drama and then pass it on to various people in the Gujarati community to translate. I give them to different directors to interpret so that the production retains an originality of approach. We look a little fresher, a quality which uptill recently, I think Adi's plays lacked."

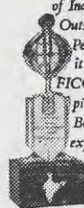
Parsi theatre Patel says "will remain largely as escapism. If a play was just for a Parsi audience it would have only eight or nine runs. Whereas otherwise it goes for around eighty shows. The

involvement of the audience in the atmosphere of the play is important. As a Parsi I might be interested in a really serious play, say, on some problem in our community, but the non-Parsi audiences would have no involvement in the play."

Though born in Bombay Patel was brought up in Bulsar for ten years of his childhood. "It was exciting," he recalls, "there was a bungalow and wide open spaces and mango trees. It had a tremendous influence on me. I like to run away there from Bombay." Of his three children, he finds his eldest daughter is the most interested in the theatre, "she once collected three or four friends and put up a concert." In imparting the Zoroastrian religion to his children, Patel says "I have not made them conscious of it or tried to deliberately influence them. They wear their *sudra* and *kusti* of their own will." His children have accepted the faith without "posing any problems. They say their religion is a faith, and I feel no amount of influence can artificially instill that faith." He feels that no one should be forced into accepting a particular creed, and that ultimately, "we are one world community."

Manjula Padmanabhan

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BOMBAY DYEING

Dr. (Maj) Aderbad B. Irani

He was born in Kerman, Iran, in March nineteen hundred and twelve. At the age of eight he sailed with his parents, three sisters and a brother for India. His father died of pneumonia on the trip. On arrival in Bombay the family lived in a one-room tenement and Aderbad was raised in an orphanage. But those humble beginnings did not deter the young Irani from rising to eminence, nor once having risen, turn his back on those who were less fortunate. Before he died of a heart attack on 16th May, he characteristically worked a full day, at his Cumballa Hill eye clinic.

His sudden death has left a vacuum, both in the field of ophthalmology and in the Iranian Zoroastrian Anjuman, which he served and headed for many years. With the major battle for securing the Pahlgar lands of the Anjuman fought and won, Dr. Irani ensured a substantial source of income for the Anjuman.

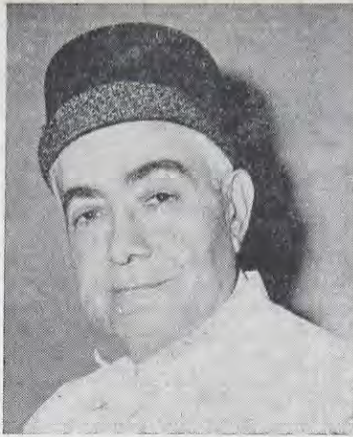
Despite his being a heart patient he strove to serve. In 1972 he stood for election to the Parsi Panchayat. He withdrew his candidacy in favour of Nanabhoy Jeejibhoy when the latter offered to contribute a substantial amount of money and land to the Panchayat if elected.

He was active in fostering good relations between India and Iran and served on several committees for that purpose. He served as an eye doctor on the Parsi Panchayat Health Unit since 1947. He was also the honorary treasurer of the Federation of the Parsi Zoroastrian Anjuman of India. For many years he served on the Advisory Board of *Parsiana*.

His academic qualifications included a diploma in ophthalmology from Oxford University and a D.O.M.S. from London.

When war broke out, he joined the British Army and in April 1942 he came with the R.A.M.C. to India. Three months later, he got married and the next month he was given his first posting in Ranchi.

In 1943, he was posted to



Calcutta, Kohima and Agartala and finally he was appointed Ophthalmologist-in-charge of the P.O.W. camp in Dehra Dun. During the first year of his service, he was decorated for distinguished service at the front and he also set up eye departments in Ranchi, Calcutta and Dehra Dun.

In December 1945, he decided to leave the army and start his own Eye Hospital in Bombay.

Parsiana extends its condolences to the bereaved family members of its long-time ally.

Nusserwanji Cawasji Vakil

Nusserwanji was the fifth in an unbroken line of *vakils* (lawyers, advocates) in his family. His spirit of justice and fair play characterised his pattern of life. With these traits he left a mark on the soil of Gujarat as could be witnessed by the crowd of a hundred thousand who came to pay him their last homage at a halt at Baroli when his body was being carried from Baroda to Bombay. He succumbed to a heart attack following a short illness, at three in the morning on 4th May 1974 in Baroda where he was Vice-Chancellor of Baroda University, an assignment which he amply merited by virtue of his learning, his administrative ability and his keen sense of duty. He was one man whom the students listened to and the authorities respected.

After taking his degree in law Nusserwanji joined his father

Cawasji in legal practice. Cawasji was then the President of the Surat Parsi Panchayat. At public request Nusserwanji was taken on the Board of Trustees of the Surat Panchayat in 1941 and in 1945 he was elected as its Vice-President. On the death of Cawasji, Nusserwanji became the President, a post he held for ten years upto 1960. In that year Gujarat became a separate state and his services were called on for initiating, establishing and organising the Ahmedabad City Civil Court. On completion of this assignment he became its First Principal Judge. Due to his entry in the service as a judiciary he had to resign the Presidentship of The Surat Parsi Panchayat. Yet he maintained close contact and remained a real help to the last in solving its many intricate problems. In 1962 he was appointed a judge of the Gujarat High Court. He retired in 1970.

Immediately thereafter he was appointed Vice-Chancellor of Maharaja Syajirao University in Baroda, a position which needed a man of tact, talent and tolerance in the growing atmosphere of student unrest. At the expiry of this period he was reinstated as one most suitable for the job as he had done laudable work in stabilizing the otherwise eruptive situations.

He was also appointed to investigate the causes of the communal riots in Gujarat for which he submitted a reliable and learned report. At the time of his death Nusserwanji was 66 years old. Due to disrupted railway services his family members could not travel to Baroda and it was decided to bring his body to Bombay. Maneck Gyara, the present President and Dhunjishah Gyara, a senior trustee of Surat Parsi Panchayat rushed to Baroda by car from Surat and brought his body to Bombay where his aged mother of 93 years and his sons, daughters, other relatives and a large number of friends, acquaintances and admirers of all communities were awaiting to pay their homage and to attend the last religious rites at Doongerwadi.

P. B. Warden

YOUTH TIMES

By Pervin Mahoney

"They knew hardly anything of what I might call Parsi-lore: folk legend, old songs, the significance of the *Jashan* ceremony. But they were terribly keen and at the end everybody was singing *Chayye hame Zarhosti*." So explained Dr. Mehroo D. Bengalee, who along with Ms Perin D. Adrianwalla of the Parsi Panchayat Counselling Bureau recently organized a nine day training programme in leadership for sixty-four Parsi youngsters at the Byramjee Jeejeebhoy High School. The youths attended lectures and visited several institutions in Bombay.

"One day we asked the kids to write about what religious problem was uppermost in their minds. One boy wondered whether Christianity was more in touch with present day life than Zoroastrianism. Another asked why prayers should be said in a language that was not understood by the majority of the community and why women should not be allowed inside the fire-temples when they had their period. Others questioned why we did not accept converts and placed restrictions on marrying outside the faith. The findings showed they were perfectly aware of the problems facing the community today."

To further probe the attitudes of the youngsters towards the community a questionnaire was devised (see box) the results of which were "even more dismaying," said Ms Bengalee. "Our young people had no idea of the facilities offered by the community—the funds and scholarships, nor had they ever been informed about them. They were just not community conscious. For instance, when asked to name prominent Parsis, the only names mentioned were (Field Marshal) Sam Manekshaw, Farok Engineer, Vice-Admiral Jal Cursetjee, Naval Tata and (Mayor) Boman-Behram. They could not think of any others. So we knew what direction we had to work in, what diet we had to feed them."

Ms Bengalee, who is a professor and counsellor at the St. Xavier's Institute of Education, was inspired to run the course because "I wanted to do something for the community. I had run this sort of course before but never solely for Parsis. We charged ten rupees per head. We had an extreme mixture of wealth and poverty, of kids from the subsidized housing colonies and those from expensive boarding-schools. I wondered how this grouping would come off but finally a great spirit of comradeship developed."

While the students' reaction was heartening, the response from the principals of the Parsi schools "was very disappointing," said Ms Bengalee. "I wrote to 23 Parsi schools, asking them to send the five best Parsi students who had just done their SSC or ISC. I had hardly any response. Apparently it was too much for each school to contact their pupils by writing five postcards. Anyway, two days



Pic. by Farokh Reporter
Bengalee: Results dismaying

before the course was due to begin, I reluctantly wrote to the non-communal schools, such as St. Xavier's and New Activity. The response from these was excellent.

"I just don't know what is lacking in the running of our Parsi schools. I've been in the teacher-training field for 18 years now.

(Continued on page 40, col. 1)

ATTITUDE SCALE

Below are the results of the questionnaire filled in by the participants

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The community provides me with the best of opportunities	15	25	9	10	2
The community gives me sufficient chance to develop individual expression	6	21	14	13	5
The community provides me with facilities for physical development	5	22	15	16	3
The community encourages me in all my intellectual endeavours	6	24	18	10	2
The community has leaders in every sphere of activity	25	29	6	2	—
The community has enough economic means to help every member to realise his potential	16	12	17	14	1
I will not change my religion for any other	50	9	2	—	—
The community prepares me for great deeds in life	13	26	12	8	1
The community orients me to civic responsibilities and obligations to my country	12	33	10	4	1
The community helps me to inculcate social and moral virtues	9	34	12	4	1

Few families have such a distinguished record of service to the Armed Forces as the Engineers. The four brothers Aspy, Jangoo, Minoo and Ronnie made the Air Force their career, and in return they received the highest honours the Armed Forces and the country could bestow on them. April 1st is Air Force Day and to mark that occasion, Parsiana's Executive Editor Geeta Doctor interviewed Air Marshal M. M. Engineer who retired from the services in April 1973.



Roxanne, Gul, Feroza, Kaikhushru and Minoo

Flying High

"The only time I got shot down was by my wife," said former Air Marshal Minoo Merwan Engineer with a smile as he stirred a second cup of tea at the office of his vivacious wife Gul, who as the Managing Director of Selvel Agencies could hardly contain her professional instincts combined with wifely pride in speaking of her husband's achievements. In front of her stood three medallions mounted on wood with the simple inscriptions, "Karachi, December 1971, Hunters attacking oil storage dumps", "Langewala, December 1971, Hunters attacking T 59 tanks", "Raiwind, December 1971, Attack on train", commemorating Air Force victories during the 1971 war.

"My husband was Commander-in-Chief Western Command during the last war," she said. "It's the first time in India that air strategy was given proper appraisal. Nineteen sixty-five was just a Pyrrhic victory. But this time our boys were simply magnificent. In India there is a tendency to give all the credit to the army. I don't think many people realize the vital role that the air force played."

The Air Marshal went on to explain, "In any warfare the Air Force plays a vital part. The army cannot move with any free-

dom unless the Air Force manages to keep the skies clear. The Israelis succeeded in 1967 because of their air supremacy. In our own Indo-Pak war we kept the Pakistani air force all the time on the defensive. We didn't give them much of a chance to do what they did in 1965. My views are borne out by the review of the 1971 campaign by a Pak Major General. He has stated in one of the chapters that the Pakistanis kept asking, 'What has happened to our Air Force?' The Pakistanis had planned a major offensive in the deserts of Rajasthan which if it had succeeded would have created a great deal of difficulties, but we had catered for these possibilities. The Pakistani army was more than surprised when we destroyed them at Langewala. Naturally the Army greatly appreciated the support that we gave them. The Air Force is generous," he added with a quizzical glance at his wife, "we allow other services to get the recognition."

By a strange irony of fate the Air Marshal had to send his fighters to bomb the very place where he had spent his early childhood. "In war we don't have any personal feelings," he said, discussing the bombing of Karachi. "Naturally when we were briefing the pilots we told

them to avoid civilian targets. They attacked the oil dumps which sent up a dark screen of smoke hanging over the whole city. I believe this had a terribly demoralizing effect on the people of Karachi.

"When people ask me where I was born I always say Karachi, though actually it was in Hyderabad, Sind," said Engineer describing how he started off on his flying career. The family left Karachi in '37 and came to Bombay where he studied at Elphinstone College until World War II broke out and as Engineer puts it, "Hitler came knocking at my doorstep. I joined the Air Force much against my elder brother, Aspi Engineer's wishes. My brother Jangoo joined Tata Airlines which gave a great deal of opportunity to youngsters in search of adventure. Scores of Parsis joined. The pilots morale was very high, maybe this was due to Parsi impatience or perhaps a craving for excitement. I remember an RAF ground instructor named Smith-Barry who was a pilot in World War I. He used to laugh at the very idea of flying with parachutes. Everything depended on split second decisions, so not surprisingly the accident toll was pretty heavy. I started training in Lahore in 1940 and graduated in Ambala in the wartime flying

schools which gave intensive short training."

Since then the Air Marshal has flown an innumerable variety of planes and had till the time of his retirement led the spectacular display of supersonic fighters that climaxes the Republic Day parade at Delhi every year. He admitted that aviation has changed greatly since he first started but maintained that in most cases it was the man behind the machine who was important. "Modern sophisticated aircraft cannot be used like a sword," he explained. "It is part of a weapon system. You must take into account the type of weapons you can carry on the aircraft and you must use them within the parameters if you can do that." It was not without some nostalgia however that he described the days when he sat in the cockpit of a "Westland Wapiti".

"Of all the planes I flew it was my favourite. It used to be a bi-plane which used to have no brakes. You cruised at 80 mph and landed at 80 mph. It was the first combat aircraft. You sat in the open cockpit with goggles and helmet. You had a navigator-cum-gunner and he used to be also in the open cockpit. You could feel the kick of flying, the wind around your face, your scarf flying about. Your engine was very reliable. Occasionally the odd plug would

blow and even with a missing cylinder the aircraft carried you back to the base. I had one such experience while flying out to sea near Juhu. In another aircraft such a thing was not possible. Once it had trouble it invariably failed and you had to do something quick about it."

It was perhaps due to these highly developed reflexes that the Air Marshal dodged marriage until "pretty late in life. Your efficiency goes down if you have to worry about your wife," he remarked and recalled how he used to tease his mother when he was stationed in Juhu in the early days of his career. "She had a flat in Worli at that time and I would tell her, 'I am coming to call on you' and would fly down low over the flat but instead of coming out she would go into a corner and start praying." The Air Marshal's career also kept him almost continuously in the combat zone, for after Burma he was sent to Japan in command of a Spitfire Squadron, during 1947-48 Kashmir kept him busy and during the '62 border skirmish with China he was in the forward areas of Assam.

"I always wear a Sudra so that in case I should die tomorrow at least I would be easily identified. But the Kusti I only wear occasionally. In the services due to the rush, I always found it difficult to wear.



With J. R. D. Tata in Leh

"I don't go around praying to God the whole time but I am religious to the extent that I respect religion. The religious foundation is established in childhood and the Zoroastrian religion does insist that the child should be made aware of the basic tenets. After that it is left to the individual to decide what he wants." Engineer felt that if many Parsis were going over to other religions today it was because, "The Parsis do not seem to be paying much attention to their religion as such. The children drift away. They do not make an effort to study their religion carefully; if they find that they get greater comfort in some other belief I don't condemn them, they are welcome to get their own peace. As for all these Babas, these so called great Saints of India, they practise some form of ESP. The people who go to them are completely in their control. When you go to some of these Babas you go for something, otherwise there would be no need to go.

"The Parsi community is by and large very broadminded," he commented and felt that those who clung to rigidly orthodox views on subjects such as intermarriage



Karachi, 1931 : Minoo, Homi, Rashid, Merewan, Ronnie

and the towers of silence were in the minority. "It doesn't make any difference to me whether the vultures or the worms have a tea party," he said with an amused shrug. "Though I can understand why the older generation should feel particular about it. It is a matter of sentiment. Some of these religious practices were established by the old priests who shaped them according to what they thought might have happened in the past. Personally if you ask me I think Cyrus was buried. But it's likely that after the Muslims came, those of the old faith would go quietly and leave the bodies of their dead on hilltops. It is perhaps time that they changed to something more progressive.

"It's a good thing," he said as regards intermarriage though he felt that it was unfortunate that "if a woman married out of the community her children should be prevented from becoming Parsis. Fathers are not religious, the religious foundation is mainly influenced by the mother. Take the Jews for example. Jewish mothers are famous for the power that they wield and it is the

mother who teaches her religion to the children."

The Air Marshal spoke with great pride about the community and reserved special mention for that famous Parsi speciality, *Dhansak*. "Food and language are the two things that keep the Parsi community together. *Dhansak* is the great uniting factor," he said with utmost solemnity. "Food is a very important thing to a Parsi. Good food is his main weakness. I remember Air Marshal Dhatigara. He sometimes used to get so wild at the food in the mess he used to go and cook his own food. His speciality was *accouri* and wherever he was he would go and make his *accouri*, so much so that even today you can go to any Air Force mess and ask for *Dhatigara Bhoojias* as they have come to be known.

"As for language, you know what the Parsi language is don't you? You go to any Parsi gathering and if you find that they are swearing and cursing at each other you can be sure that the party is a great success. The more they curse one another, the more they are showing their affection for each other.

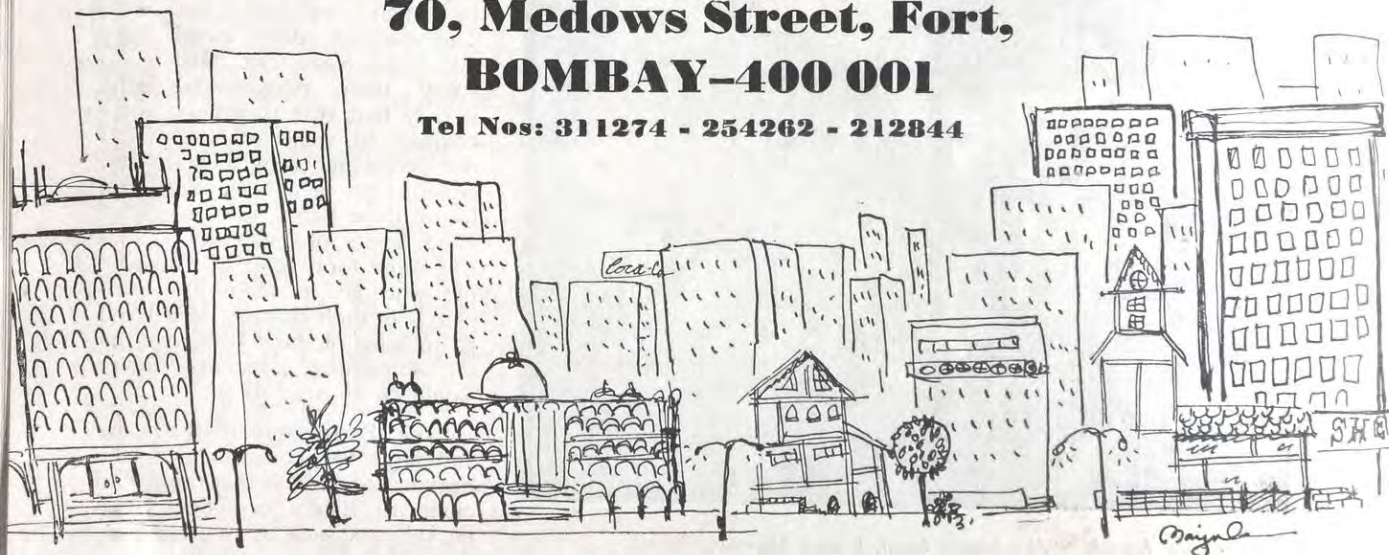
"But," he continued in a more serious vein, "there is no doubt that Parsis have played a very important part in Indian life, particularly its economic life. In every field you will find that a Parsi will be holding an important position. One thing is noticeable: the Parsis are generally well to do. My colleagues in North India used to pull my leg and say that all Parsis are very rich. It's not just that. Maybe it is that they have a generous outlook. They have this habit of forming trusts that look after the welfare of the community. If everyone else in other communities did the same for their own people I am sure it would raise the standard of living in their communities also. Parsis are by and large progressive. They have managed to merge with the mainstream and yet preserve their identity. I don't see any reason why they should not continue to do so, though I realize that some problems may crop up. If for example a Parsi marries a Christian do they celebrate *Papeti* or do they celebrate Christmas?"

"One could make a lovely fusion!" said his wife ebulliently, thereby solving the whole problem.

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Telegrams "Homanicbid" Bombay-2

Youth (Continued from page 35)

Out of the 1,000 teachers we train every year, only seven or eight are Parsis. I'm really surprised by this. What's more, these seven or eight are all women. There are no Parsi men coming forth wanting to become teachers. I really wonder what will happen to our Parsi schools. There will be no trained teachers for them, and no principals. We will find ourselves in the position of having all non-Parsi teachers in our schools! We are failing miserably in this!

"The Leadership Training Programme showed that our young people are enthusiastic, once somebody has stimulated them. The group developed such strong bonds. The participants formed a Youth Leadership Chain. Each kid is to adopt another in order that

a chain can be formed to carry these ideas further. On the first Saturday in June, for example, 35 of the group turned up, though they had not received any notice asking them to come. Anyone can join the Chain, provided he or she is at least 16 years old and has passed the tenth standard. We met the parents at a special conference and they were all for the follow-up. Parents today find it especially hard to understand the complications of the present educational system—the ten-plus-two-plus-three formula and all that. The career guidance school-leaving kids receive in the ordinary course of events consists merely of going through the three standard preferences—Science, Commerce and Arts. The community would greatly benefit if a Parsi polytechnic existed. The idea has been raised before, and apparently the funds

could be found. But nothing concrete has yet been done."

Poets (Continued from page 21)

work it would be pointless talking about it.

This did not however deter him from reading out three of his poems during a 'Meet the Authors' programme organised at the National Book Fair last February. After the reading, which was rendered as lightly and poignantly as only a poet can, the Chairman asked the audience whether they would like to ask the poet any questions. There was a vast embarrassing silence. Could it be that Jussawalla's worst fears had been realised and that people were not interested or is it rather that poets have surrounded themselves and their work with such an aura of mystery that it is impossible to reach out to them?

—All Religions must be tolerated...
for...every man must get to Heaven
his own way.

—FREDERICK THE GREAT—
In re Catholic Schools.

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