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June-July 1974

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PARSIANA COVER of a yesteryear Parsi family designed by Ms Mini Boatwala. (Prints courtesy *The History of the Parsis* by Dosabhai Framji Karaka, Macmillan & Co.)



editor's column

New Year is a time for nostalgia, for looking back and wondering how we managed to survive yet another rotation of the sun and how many more circles we will complete before we have to alight from the carousel. Our cover, designed by Ms Mini Boatwala, harkens back to the days of the *badyan* and *jama-pichora*, of the long-sleeved blouse and lace *sudreh*, of velvet slippers and embroidered *jhablas*, to a time when the community flourished and you could identify a family by the pugrees they wore. Old institutions die hard but they die and once where there were fifty-two pugree makers in India, today there is only one.

So unless some one else learns the art of pugree-making, our interview question this issue, "Do You Prefer The Pugree Or Fetah" may be an academic one. We'll all have to wear the fetah. Anyhow, in keeping with our new policy of getting everyone's views on everything so as to keep everyone happy we asked eight figures in addition to our customary cross-section of Parsis which they preferred. And either due to the pressure of time or the mind-boggling enormity of the question they all refrained from making their views known except for Piloo Mody. For his consideration he has our vote for life, even if he should decide to merge with the commies. His

answers are given on page 18 in our interview feature.

Among those who did not respond were J. R. D. Tata (his executive assistant wrote in to say as Jeh was "extremely busy with matters connected with the annual accounts and the annual general meetings of several Tata companies, I regret it has not been possible for me to put up your questionnaire to him. In any case, as Mr. Tata receives numerous requests for answering questionnaires, sending messages and articles, etc from various organisations all over the country, and as owing to extremely heavy pressure of work it is not possible for him to respond to all of them, he has made it a policy to decline them uniformly rather than discriminate between them"), Naval Tata (his P. A. wrote to say he was out of India for a few days and that "even after his return, due to his other pre-occupations, I do not think he will be able to respond to your request. I, therefore, hope you will understand his inability in replying to your letter"), Nani Palkhivala (he replied personally addressing the note "My dear Jehangirji", signed it "Nani" and noted he was "so hard pressed for time that you will kindly excuse me for my inability to accede to your request for certain answers." He apparently mistook me for Jehangir Patel of Gokak-Patel-Volkart fame!), Minoo Masani (addressed me as "My dear Jehangir"—no mistaken identity this time—and

noted, "while I appreciate the invitation and the honour, I must really ask you to excuse me on this occasion from answering your questions on Parsi head-gear. Perhaps some time when the topic is one on which I can put forward my ideas, I shall be happy to answer"). Soli Godrej (his P. A. phoned to say he was out of the country and though he would be returning shortly he would not have time to reply), Naval Godrej (no reply) and Homi Sethna (no reply). Anyway, this did not prevent the *Parsiana* staff from coming up with suitable headgear for these eminent gents (see cartoon).

While we're on the subject of headgear, our readers may be interested in learning of the origin of hats as related in the *Parsiana History of Parsis and Other Greats* Vol. II: "From whenever it was decided that skin and hair were not adequate to shield the body from the onslaughts of nature, people have sought various ways to adorn themselves. From loin cloths to three piece suits and from ankle length gowns to the bikini, the quest continues. And while people lost their heads over what to wear,

they decided they might as well place something on that turnip-like protrusion.

"Non-Parsi historians are still divided as to where, why and who invented the first hat but those who are familiar with our ancient scriptures know without thought that the inventor was a Parsi: Jehangir Topiwalla. 'Tops' as he was known to his friends, discovered early in life that if he grew his hair long, as was the custom, it constantly obstructed his vision. To circumvent this, he tied a band around his head and so the first crude hat came into existence. While his sight improved, he soon found the band gave him a headache. Shortly thereafter, Topiwalla invented aspirin. But that's another story. His band was later modified to cover the entire head to ward off his elders' blows. In those days striking the head was considered an accepted means of implanting knowledge. Shortly thereafter Topiwalla failed his exams (his teacher labelled him a "Mad Hatter") and went into the hat business. From a poor background, he now went from rags to hats. The rest is common knowledge: his heirs fought and branched off into two groups, one inventing the pugree, the other the fetah." The battle continues to this day and *Parsiana* is proud to be able to help perpetuate it and divide the community further and wash dirty linen in public and thereby increase its circulation.

On a far less controversial note, the Iranian Zoroastrian Anjuman unanimously elected Noshirwan Muluk Irani president of the association. The office was formerly held by the late Dr. (Maj.) Aderbad Behram Irani. The new president is a prominent entrepreneur in several fields including construction and breweries. *Parsiana* welcomes his investiture and will focus on him and the Anjuman in a later issue.

In other heartening news, the J. N. Tata Endowment for the Higher Education of Indians has selected amongst others, 15 Parsis for scholarships. The recipients are: Adi K. Asavaid, Rustom M. Billimoria, Bomi M. Billimoria, Maheyar R. Billimoria, M. N. Behramkamdin,



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They are part of a group of 61 Tata Scholars, the largest ever selected in one year, who will join Universities in America, England and Canada. The endowment was established 80 years ago by Jamshedji Tata and has since awarded loan scholarships to the tune of one crore of rupees to over 900 Indian scholars. While this is a cause for rejoicing, the real test of its worth is to be determined by the per cent of recipients who return or once having returned are meaningfully employed and once employed are not overtaken by the despair and frustration that characterizes the lives of the 'foreign-returned' (and everybody else). One also wonders why of the 15 Parsis chosen, only two happen to be women? Is it that parents are reluctant to let their female offspring venture forth or are the girls themselves content to work in the kitchen?

From Poona, the chairman of the Poona Zarhosti Seva Mandal Mobed Fund, Ms Frannie B. Boywala writes to tell us of the varied projects undertaken by the fund since its inception in 1966:

"The fund completes its eight years during which we have looked after our *mobeds* well, helping them with their medical bills, tuition fees of their children and giving hamper packages of household articles and/or cloth such as mull and longcloth etc. Owing to the continuous rise of daily commodities we pay half their house rents, and their electricity bills. We also have a small Saving-cum-Aid Scheme to help them in illness, deaths, weddings, navjots and old age.

"All these activities need funds, hence we appeal to Parsi firms and associations and our various Parsi Charity Trusts also, that as we, in our small way, are trying to meet the needs of our *mobeds* and their families, we request you to help us in maintaining our services in this deserving cause."

Jamshed Pavri of Canada is one of those rare individuals



who offers to do something and then *actually* does it. As a result of his literary research we carry our first feature on outstanding Parsis of yesteryear. To try and add some local colour to the mass of information Pavri sent us on Sorabjee Bengalee, *Parsiana* Associate Editor Pervin Mahoney searched high and low and then filed this report on one of her expeditions:

"If one is hunting for some really out-of-the-way, esoteric, erudite book, one would have to look no further than the library of the Asiatic Society of Bombay. So when I wanted to find the collected works of Sorabjee Bengalee (now out of print), I made straight for Bombay's aristocratic-looking cream-coloured Town Hall where the library has been housed since 1830, expecting ceiling-high shelves of volumes impeccably indexed for ready reference, with librarians who knew at once where to look for anything under the Indological sun.

"The bubble burst on entrance. Apparently one can't glide into the library up the main flight of steps. One has to go in a side-entrance, which is unexpectedly adorned with lines of dirty washing (I remember a preponderance of grimy towels), manned by a crowd of half-dressed loungers. Later I was told they had something to do with the Stamp Office,

which no doubt explains everything.

"My craving for grandeur was satisfied at last in the main lobby, which is filled with marble statues of dukes and viceroys dressed up as Roman senators and Byronic heroes. The walls are hung with portraits of subjects like the first Indian to gain membership of the Royal Asiatic Society (as it then was): a Parsi, of course.

"And so to the library itself. The *Collected Works* were not to be found in any of the index-systems, some of whose cards were as antique, crumbling and brown as the works they listed. It was sad to think that the writings of one of the most outstanding Indians of the 19th century cannot easily be traced. However, the catalogue did list a biography: *Life of Sorabjee Shapurjee Bengalee* by Nowrojee Sorabjee Bengalee. With elation—for it was the only source I had come across—I asked the librarian for it. She said I would have to wait a little, for the book had to be fetched from the godown.

"I waited for an hour and a half. I looked at all the new books, and at the three-week-old foreign newspapers, and at the gentlemen snoozing in the reading-room. I overheard a chat between the librarian and an admirer. I mused on the architec-

tural merits and bureaucratic flaws of the library. I even snoozed a little myself. At last a peon appeared with a book dusty enough to have been fetched from the godown. I ran to the counter; surely this must be mine! Then I saw the title. It was in Gujarati! I can read Gujarati, but it takes all day and a dictionary. But the Gods were merciful: though half the book is in Gujarati, the other half is an English translation. A visit to the Asiatic is recommendable. But take along a book to read while you wait."

Those who picture the editor of this magazine as an incarnation of the devil, will be surprised to know that I was once a Boy Scout. To revive memories of those distant days (New Year being a time for looking back and all that) I attended the annual *jashan* of the 51st West Bombay group. Nothing had changed. Group Leader Parekh still lectures on the need to be good and honest, Scouter Jehangir Master's temper is still as hot as the tropical sun and Chief Guest Homi Lala still moves around in a plain white cotton bushshirt. It is reassuring in these days to know there still are people who spend their Sunday mornings trying to inculcate in youngsters the need for good thoughts, good words and good deeds. May their tribe increase.

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□ But for the Educational Loan which my twin brother got from Bank of India, he could not have gone abroad for higher studies, in spite of a brilliant academic career.

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Separate But Equal

I read in the last issue of *Parsiana* ("The Doongerwadi Ban") the following sentence: "No one has been able to give me a satisfactory answer why non-Parsis are not allowed in the *agiaries* and at certain ceremonies." I may just add that I find an explanation given very often by people of all faiths. For instance, in the *Vedanta Kesari*, Aug. '74 issue which I just received, I find the following: "To avoid confusion of ideas and beliefs, many religions advise their followers not to mix with the followers of other religions or to enter other places of worship." The writer here is a Hindu Swami and a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order.

I may also add that a distinguished American, Col. Olcott in a lecture on Zoroastrianism delivered at Cama Hall in the last century, when Mr. Cama himself was present, said he would not enter an *agiar* even if invited, though he loved this religion. It was all a matter of vibrations.

An outsider, however sympathetic, brings with him a certain quality of scepticism or unbelief, which destroys the atmosphere, which an ignorant man of the same faith may not bring. For instance, the present writer is a Parsi and conditioned to cover his head in a temple. In Europe, he would not remove his felt hat out of respect. This custom there is considered a sign of disrespect.

LETTERS

Hot words would ensue in the premises of the church. All this spoils the atmosphere. Perhaps that is the reason.

DINSHAW BUXEY

No Return

Ms Barbara Irani states among other things in the last issue of *Parsiana*: "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." I fully agree. For such people, Framroze Rustomjee J.P. U.M. Solicitor (England) Proctor S.C. & Notary Public, Colombo has published a book in 1959 entitled "Daily Prayers of the Zoroastrians in English with transliterations and meanings of words of the Avestan Text, also a free translation of each prayer and explanations for teaching same to children—Part I".

I do hope and pray that such books will be useful to people who are genuinely interested in the prayers. God knows all languages.

The world famous palmist Cheiro, who had nothing in favour of any religion, has written in one of his books that in reply to a request from a Parsi lady at a seance in Moscow in 1905 to communicate with her dead relative, the spirit replied that this person belongs to a religion whose prayers and ceremonies do not permit them to return to this earth. Such uncalled-for tribute is enough to allay the fears of some voices.

K. D. CHARGEMAN

Better Priests

For many years I have been feeling the lack of an understanding of the prayers that our priests chant at the various ceremonies. If any one asks a priest the meaning of a prayer, he is unable to answer, or gives some garbled explanation saying that we must have faith. Of course I am not referring to our High Priests (Dasturs) who are very learned.

The training our priests have in the Seminary at Jogeshwari is very outdated. I feel that a priest should have a thorough knowledge of Avesta as well as be fluent in English and able to express the meanings of our prayers in good English. It is very sad to see our young people either thoroughly indifferent to our prayers, or being drawn to other religions—specially Catholicism, where the ceremonies are performed in English, a language which they can understand.

Priests must be clever men who wish to dedicate their lives to helping people to understand their religion and to live up to its tenets. We should be prepared to pay them well, or have a fund which will provide for them and help their children in their education. We can start by having fewer priests but much superior priests. This would help both the young as well as the not-so-young—the parents. As most Parsis learn to read, write and speak in English today, our religion would become a living force again, as it was in the past, which would not only comfort us in times of great stress and strain but help us to understand God and lead the Good Life of loving and helping others and evolving to higher and higher levels of consciousness—living the life that our Prophet Zarathushtra taught us to live in order to come nearer to God.

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I trust what I have said makes you feel the urgency of the case as I know many young people going regularly to Catholic churches and being baptized, only because they do not know Gujarati, cannot understand our prayers, find the English translations exceedingly dull and largely written in very mediocre English. Translations of our *Gathas*, the *Yashts* and other small, beautiful prayers should be more freely rendered, keeping in mind the spirit behind the words, and in language that flows like that of Juan Mascaro in his translations of the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagvad Gita* about which Rabindranath Tagore wrote: "Your translation ... has caught from those great words the inner voice that goes beyond the boundaries of words."

PAREEN LALKAKA

Numbered Days

Why this hue and cry about *dokhma* and *dokhmanishini* when the Parsi community is fast dwindling? The causes of dwindling are quite obvious and cannot be stopped. They are: marrying out of the community, marriages delayed for want of accommodation, family planning and emigration. Many changes have taken place in the tenets and fundamental religious ceremonies of Parsis in the past few years and allowing those who opt for burial or cremation to have their way will not in any way diminish the zeal or number of our community. In fact, cremation and burial are not at all new to Parsis and burial grounds far exceed the number of *dokhmas* all over India. Is orthodoxy a virtue or an evil? The Parsi Panchayat of India (Federation of India) should sit in a round table conference along with other intelligentsia and find out a *via media* before it is too late, lest this (mode of disposal of dead bodies) becomes another cause for dwindling.

J. D. MISTRY
Secunderabad

The destruction of the community is fast approaching. Prices are soaring for the performance of religious ceremonies, sandalwood costs Rs. 70/- per kg., a 20-yard piece of mul cloth for the sacred

apron costs Rs. 80/- and the sacred thread (*kusty*) costs Rs. 30. The majority cannot afford these prices, hence the downfall of the Zoroastrian religion.

T. B. DARUWALA

Duty Bound

The issues of *Parsiana* are raising as many new questions as they are answering. This, I think, is a healthy sign.

But I am disappointed to read so much about what appears to be apathy on the part of the

Parsi community on matters that so imminently affect its future. It would be a great shame if a community that has done so much for its adopted country and the rest of the human race should, through lack of interest by its members, cease to exist. However, I realize that it is your duty to point out these conditions and to keep your readers informed on the latest developments. Thus, those that do act will be doing so from a sound basis of facts.

M. C. LONG
Tehran, Iran

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Think World

I appreciated greatly your editorial in the last issue of *Parsiana* wherein you declared you were "first a citizen of this world."

It may interest you to know that Tris Coffin, Lion International President for the year ended this June, gave the world body the slogan: "Think Internationally." If more people, especially those of the rising generation, could follow this slogan seriously, there would surely be peace in this mad, wicked world.

DHUN MEHTA

Parsi Way of Life

I am keen on writing a paper on the Parsis especially the cultural aspects of the younger members of the community. Opinions on the community from old and young Parsis of either sex would be greatly appreciated. Any material may be sent to me at the following address: Mr. J. Alexander, Behind Ichanath Temple, Post: Nanpura, Surat.

J. ALEXANDER

April Fools

In *Kali Yuga* (the era of Kali) when the common man talks about the involvement of America's President in a scandal or two, I would not expect *Time* (April 1) magazine to be intellectually honest in publishing the article with a picture of the *dokhma*.

Four persons rarely enter a *dokhma* with a corpse and certainly not without *paivand*. The picture thus does not truthfully represent the inside view of the *dokhma* and it can therefore be said that the photographer has attempted to fool the readers of *Time* magazine the world over.

N. K. TODIWALLA

The Golden Mean

How fair are our Parsi papers in reporting answers pertaining to Parsi questions? What is the need of the hour in the community?

Sahib, we are aware of the shortage of newsprint. Many people are in the habit of writing long lectures and there are many

(Continued on page 40, col. 1)

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THE MAKING OF A TRUSTEE

With a confident stride, Ms Nelie Noble marched into the Panchayat hall on election day, her colourful red sari billowing in the dimly-lit lobby. On hand were her party faithfuls who in a matter of hours elected their tempestuous leader to the trusteeship vacated by Nadirsha Mulla, the former Chairman of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat. Mulla did not seek re-election to the Panchayat on which he has served for three decades.

Ms Noble's victory was as certain as the sunrise. Her party, the Independent Orthodox, had claimed all the 189 seats on the crucial 'E' Register in February. The 'E' Register voters, along with the 189 members of the 'F' Register (donors), elect the trustees of the Parsi Panchayat. The only opposition candidate, Dr. Pestonji B. Warden, stated he ran for office only because he believed the election should not go uncontested and voters should have a choice. But judging from the lopsided 228 to 13 returns, it became apparent that the voters did not want an alternative to "Apri Nelie". Warden, in his election manifesto, accused his opponent of resorting to "back-door tactics" in the past and of "misguiding" voters. Ms Noble for her part refused to shake hands with him on election day, stating "I only shake hands with gentlemen." And to Trustee Erach Nadirsha's remark, "I hope we can all work together as a team," she reportedly replied, "Joisu" (We'll see).

Ms Noble's election manifesto is equally vague. Aside from stating she was orthodox, a staunch Zoroastrian and in favour of *dokhmanashini*, the doctor cum social worker put forth little else. *Parsiana's* request for an interview, the second such petition, did not even merit a response.

The Panchayat Ms Noble will serve on is undergoing the worst crisis in its history. With most of its investments earning a negligible interest, its material resources lying fallow, the recent Government ordinances freezing a substantial portion of the share

dividends, salary increments to the poorly paid Panchayat staff and an unprecedented rate of inflation in the country, the Panchayat may well be on the brink of economic bankruptcy.

The crucial finance portfolio which Mulla had handled uninspiringly before was turned over to Shiavax Vakil at the outgoing Chairman's last meeting, at which Boman K. Boman-Behram was absent. Vakil's plans to streamline and reshuffle the finances were thwarted when at the next meeting—at which Vakil was absent—the portfolio was wrested away and entrusted to the new Chairwoman, Lady Hirabai Jehangir. The 83-year-old dowager has since been unable to attend the fortnightly trustee meetings due to a kidney ailment.

The game of musical portfolios is only a symptom of the bitter infighting amongst the trustees themselves. With Boman-Behram, Nelie Noble, Lady Jehangir and Dr. Aspi Golwalla at one end, Erach Nadirsha and P. P. Khambatta in the middle and Shiavax Vakil at the other end, a see-saw momentum prevails. But the trustees are all capable of functioning independently, as was witnessed by the recent rescinding of the infamous Doongerwadi resolution requiring Parsis to sign a statement to the effect that non-Parsis will be banned from attend-

ing funeral prayers or viewing the deceased following the ceremonies, by a vote of four to two (Nadirsha, Golwalla, Vakil and Khambatta in favour of rescinding and Boman-Behram and Nelie Noble against; Lady Jehangir was absent).

While the rescinding of the resolution Ms Noble had championed so ardently must have been frustrating to a candidate whose manifesto was devoted largely to preserving the *status quo* of Doongerwadi, it will not be her last such experience. The Doongerwadi estate, already in the red by around Rs. 30,000, has sanctioned approximately Rs. 24,000 over a two-year period for the purchase of the metal stretchers on which the corpses are carried. Vakil's proposal to raise money by erecting hoardings on the outer walls of the estate adjacent to the Kemp's Corner fly-over was rejected.

But aside from the problems of Doongerwadi, a trusteeship on the Panchayat would acquaint anyone with the finer points of frustration. The trustees' jurisdiction is limited to managing and administering the funds and properties entrusted to it. Its resolutions and pronouncements on all other issues have no legal, moral or religious binding on Parsis. But in many ways Ms Noble's election has changed the traditional composition of the Panchayat. Once the aloof and staid preserve of men of great standing or wealth or both, today it is very much caught up in the hurly-burly of Parsi politics. Whether this will make it more responsive to the needs of the community will depend on how the Panchayat handles its vast resources, most of which are presently lying dormant.

The maneuvering for the seat vacated by Mulla started soon after the recent 'E' Register elections held in February in which Boman-Behram's and Nelie Noble's party, the Independent Orthodox, swept the polls. The 189 elected members of the 'E' Register, along

(Continued on page 40, col. 2)

Resolution Rescinded

The trustees of the Parsi Panchayat have rescinded by a vote of four to two the infamous Doongerwadi Resolution requiring Parsi-Zoroastrians to give a written undertaking that non-Parsis would be barred from attending funeral ceremonies and paying their last respects to the deceased.



Nariman Pugreewalla: "It's not a trade that can be learnt overnight" (Photos by Farokh Reporter)

THE TWILIGHT OF THE PUGREES

Interviews by Sanobar Marker

The march of history is marked by many subtle milestones. Most of these seemingly innocuous events slip by unnoticed. There was a period when every respectful head had a pugree perched prominently on it; Parsis, Marwaris, Kutchis, Gujaratis and many other communities wore them with pride. Aside from protecting the head from the vagaries of nature, the pugree served to cover baldness, increase height, distinguish individuals and improve the posture. It was the heyday of the pugrees and the Parsis. Then came the fetah. Fetahwallas considered the pugree an Indian corruption of the true Persian headgear. The controversy raged.

But other events were fast overtaking the pugree. Aside from the fickleness of fashion, a realization dawned that hair was adequate covering for the head—it was no longer considered unclean, it had come into its own; concealed-heels added to height; cars became sleeker and not conducive to high headgear and jostling crowds ruined many a hat. Uneasy rested the head that wore the pugree.

"Before we were busy making three pugrees a year for the fashion-conscious Parsi," notes Nariman Pugreewalla in his antiquated chambers next to the *Bombay Chronicle* office. "Nowadays the one that's made for the wedding is the first and the last." Even if the demand were to increase, the Parsi pugree could still become as extinct as the dodo.

For where there once were fifty-two pugreewallas in India, today 70-year-old Nariman is the only one left. "I am famous," he notes with melancholy pride. "Who else is there? No one. Neither here with me, nor in Bombay, nor in the world.

"If someone is willing, I will teach them," said Nariman, "but nobody is willing to learn the art of pugree-making. They all say they would like to learn but never come." Nariman has a son to whom he could have taught the trade but, he comments, "It is not in his destiny. Nor does he have the inclination. He doesn't even know how to polish a pugree.

"I don't mind teaching anyone," remarked the venerable old pugree-maker when asked whether he would mind handing over his art to a female. "But," he went on, "it



is not a trade that can be learnt overnight. "Even after observing the method very carefully, the first fifty pugrees will be ruined—that is after one and a half years of apprenticeship." He himself started to learn the trade from his father when he was just five years old. By the time he was nine he was able to polish the pugrees. Today he can make one pugree in about four hours, though normally he only makes a quarter of a pugree each day of the year, except during the monsoons.

"The making of the client's first pugree was preceded with a *sagan*. A wedding dinner and a bottle of wine were sent to the pugree-maker on the occasion of the client's marriage. *Te saro jamano uto* (Those were good times)," remarked Nariman. As the demand for pugrees decreased, so did the pugree-makers who either died or gave up their practice as did Rustom Pugreewala—the best pugree-maker of them all, according to Nariman. "He charged Rs. 20 per pugree when others charged Rs. 3 and once you wore his pugree you would never want to wear anyone else's" said Nariman. He left the business all the same and went to Bangalore and opened a restaurant.

The first pugrees were huge, made of 10 yards of cloth. "Sir Jamshedji Jeejeebhoy had one which was so wide," said Nariman stretching out his hands. "Such a one is at the showcase of the

Jeejeebhoy Dadabhoy Agiary" (see photo).

Since then pugrees have grown or shrunk according to fashion. The shortest is the Adenwalla pugree—four and three quarter inches high. A slightly bigger one, but similar to the Adenwalla pugree, is the Desai pugree. The Punegar pugree is slightly larger than the Desai. The commonest shape is that which suits the face. The gap in the crown of the pugree is of recent origin, claims Nariman. Originally the whole head was kept covered as a mark of respect. "But today they wear a pugree and smoke a cigarette at the same time," shrugged Nariman.

The former custom was to buy the material, wash it, and give it to the pugree-maker who charged four annas to make it. Gradually the price increased as the demand for it dropped, says Nariman. The cheapest pugree today costs Rs. 100 and the most expensive Rs. 200.

A young couple came in to collect their wedding pugree. Nariman held it in his hands for a minute before giving it to them. "Do you know why I have charged one hundred rupees for this?" he asked rhetorically. "It is for the art."

* * * * *

"A fetah lasts fifty to sixty

years, a long time. A pugree I don't know, maybe twenty-five years," said Homi Mistry, whose father owns the B. J. Mistry Hat and Cap Depot at Kalbadevi. It is a hereditary concern started by Homi's grandfather, but one of the sons branched out and started his own cap shop. Both shops produce fetahs but the pugrees they sell are made by Nariman Pugreewalla.

"The demand for the fetah and pugree is dropping," said Mistry. "People don't wear it any more because they want to go to ceremonies in English dress. In the *agiary* you can see for yourself, they wear only Parsi caps (made of velvet or soft silk), they don't wear a fetah or pugree.

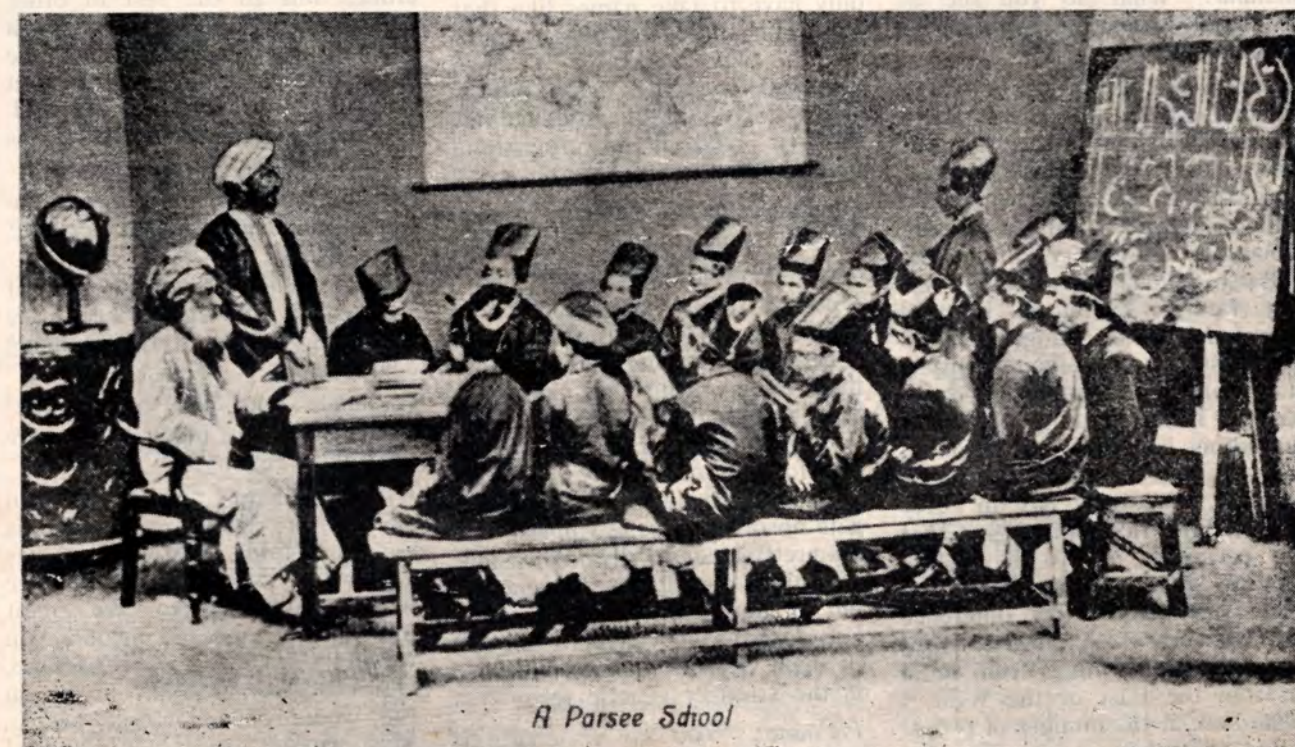
"The fetah is made from felt," he explained. "The raw material must come from foreign, then we will prepare it. Indian wool is very rough. Today C. S. Mota is sending felt sheets to Japan made from wool and we buy it from him. We shape it in our moulds in various sizes. Some Parsis have big heads." Mistry has an interesting theory to explain why the pugrees have a gap in them. "It is for airconditioning the head," he says, "to keep it cool in the hot season."

Mr. Mistry, the proprietor of Dinshaw B. Mistry, Hat and Cap

Merchant, expressed surprise that we wanted to write on what he felt was a "dead subject". But he went on to explain that "the hole on the crown of the pugree is so that you don't touch the polish." The pugree was made of cardboard and cloth and had to be looked after carefully if you wanted to preserve the polish. A fetah on the other hand was made out of felt and was not only more durable but you could have it repaired also. The fetah probably came from China where it was known as Khokhas. According to Mistry thin men should wear the fetah while the pugree was more suited to tall "hefty" men. "A man must be fair otherwise a pugree doesn't stand out," he added.

Though 99 per cent of the Parsis buy fetahs or pugrees at the time of their marriage, Mistry remarked that the demand is going down because of the increasing tendency for inter-caste marriages and due to people migrating to places like Canada.

"The art of pugree-making will die out with Nariman Pugreewala," Mistry admitted gloomily. "Nobody is prepared to waste two years to learn the trade. Making pugrees is an art. I am not a pugree-maker."



Interview: NEVILLE WADIA

It is no cliché to say that the Wadias are a household word. More Parsis live in housing constructed by that family than any other. In the world of business, shipping, textiles their name is legendary. Yet for all their contribution to the country and the community, there are many Parsis who consider them outsiders because the late Sir Ness Wadia converted to Christianity. Those of his family who follow his faith are barred from entering the fire temples or attending funeral ceremonies at the Towers of Silence. On public platforms when Parsis speak of the 'orthodox' contribution to the community

Parsiana: What do you see as the major strength of the Parsi community?

Wadia: The fact that they have maintained their identity as a community, is one of the strongest points. There's no doubt you can recognize a Parsi anywhere in India or the world. Certainly nobody in this country will mistake a Parsi for anybody else—very, very rarely. Therefore, I think there are these things, certain genetic strains in the community—things like blood groups etcetera. Whether it has anything to do with our eating habits or our drinking habits I don't know. Our environment, of course, has an effect on it. I think that the religion that has permitted us to have free contact with everybody in the world has made a big difference and therefore has allowed us to absorb so many things from India or from the East or the West. I mean look at the number of people called Chinoy, Adenwalla—you

they often fail to mention the colossal charity of 'unorthodox' families like the Wadias, Tatas and Petits. But despite the snubs, these families have never turned their back on the community. The Wadia Trusts, which have built several housing colonies for Parsis, recently financed the construction of the Cusrow Baug annexe which was inaugurated on Jamshedi Navroz by Sir Ness' son, Neville. On that occasion Neville Wadia spoke of the community's past achievements and based his prediction of a bright future on its religion, environment and genetic characteristics. (Photos by Farokh Reporter.)

only have to take names like that and you know that Parsis have been all over the world. We have absorbed so much from others. But we have still maintained our identity. This is a very strong point.

Parsiana: What percent of this is due to genetics and what percent to the religious philosophy?

Wadia: It's very difficult to divide it up but I think that genetically speaking you've got to be a strong race. You can't help that in order to survive. Otherwise you get absorbed and forgotten and lost. For instance everybody says that whoever goes to China gets absorbed by the Chinese and it's pretty true. In all the invasions of China, the Chinese have come out on top genetically. You don't know what's happened to the rest of them. It is a question of which is the stronger genetic race.

Parsiana: You say if a race is genetically strong it will survive.

Do you feel the Parsi community is still a strong genetic race?

Wadia: I think that is more or less inherent. I don't see how we could survive a hundred thousand strong and not be swallowed. Thirteen hundred years is not a short span of time. And for a very, very small community it's quite exceptional.

Parsiana: Do you feel these dwindling numbers are eventually going to tell?

Wadia: Well one of the points I emphasized on Jamshedi Navroz was the importance of housing. First of all, allow the members of the community to marry when they want to because that's one thing they can't do at the moment. You cannot expect the population to increase unless you allow them to get married. I think housing is really the number one factor. It is the best thing our family ever did, building those baus. I would like to see a lot more built.

Parsiana: People have pointed out that poverty is on the rise in the community. We read increasingly of crimes, suicides, etcetera being committed by Parsis.

Wadia: Do you think we've suffered any worse than any other community? I don't think so. I think there are more suicides, crimes and all the rest in other communities. I mean take a country like Sweden. There are more suicides in Sweden than in any other country in the world. I would assume we were less affected than most.

Parsiana: Do you think the poverty among Parsis will increase? Or stabilize? Or lessen?

Wadia: Well we've got to get readjusted. We've got to keep pace with the growing or the changing conditions.

Parsiana: Do you feel adjustments are being made or is there too much rigidity?

Wadia: There's always a certain amount of rigidity, and that is not a bad thing in itself. It shows a certain stamina, a resilience which you've got to give credit for. If you were too flexible you would become soft and succumb. Our characteristics have been on the whole of an honest people. Most Parsis are. Their standard of integrity is as high as any com-

munity in the world. Of course there are bound to be some who are bad. Talking of moral integrity and so forth everybody used to think the British were so high, but I certainly wouldn't put the British any higher than we are today.

Parsiana: If you had the option to change any one custom in the community which one would you choose?

Wadia: Some of our religious customs need modernizing. They are out of date. I don't think they were bad in principle. But they have to be revamped, reshaped and re-whatever you want to call it.

Parsiana: Since you mention the genetic factors, do you feel



I think it is a great mistake we didn't build before, even if there were certain risks involved. The major need was housing for the community. The objective should not be set aside for the sake of some technical details.

that if Parsis were to marry out of the community this would affect the genetic strain?

Wadia: Well it's bound to, yes. But it's quite extraordinary how, especially among western intermarriages the Parsi genetic strain is always there. You can distinguish a person with a Parsi father much more as a Parsi than as with the race of his or her mother. You can see it right away. He or she stands out a mile. Why it is I don't know. For instance, if you have a blond with blue eyes marrying a dark person, three out of four children on an

average will be dark and the other one will be blond. I think the same thing applies to the strength of the genetics of the Parsi community. It's a very strong strain.

Parsiana: Would you be against the children of Parsi women who marry out coming into the community?

Wadia: I wouldn't object to it. I'm rather broad minded about religion. I think it's a good thing for people to be able to practise whatever religion they like and especially those who have one parent or the other who is a Parsi. It's not a bad thing at all. The fact that we haven't allowed people to become Zoroastrian or to become Parsi is a very strong point in favour of the community and it's one of the things which has

as Zoroastrians. It keeps the identity going. And the community is always sort of getting together. I go to Toronto once a year and there are five hundred Parsis there and by God they all knew each other. They probably fight and squabble like Parsis do everywhere else in the world. But when it comes to the community of course they're all back together again. That's natural instinct and they all carry their habits and their tastes and everything else with them. They also love to make *dhansak* and all the rest wherever they go.

Parsiana: When you say Parsi and Zoroastrian, are they two synonymous words to you or are they two separate words?

Wadia: Well I look upon them as being separate, of course. One is obviously racial, the other one is religious.

Parsiana: Do you see one surviving without the other?

Wadia: I think it's very important that they should survive together. I don't think the Parsi community could possibly survive without them surviving together.

Parsiana: Have you ever considered standing for the Panchayat?

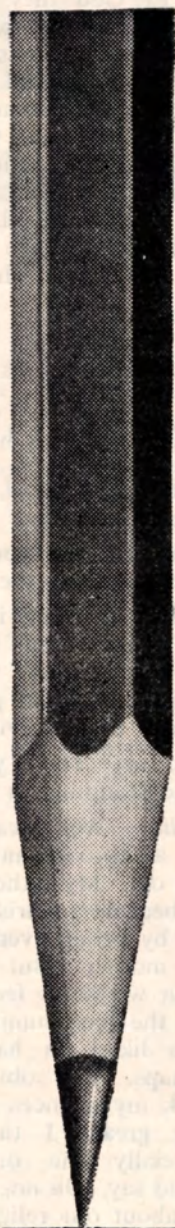
Wadia: Well I can't because I'm not a Zoroastrian, so that rules that out. My father wasn't either. He became a Christian on his own and by belief, even before he met my mother. But that does not mean we don't feel very strongly for the community, and would have liked to have had a say perhaps. But obviously I don't think my chances of standing are very great. I think everybody, especially the orthodox people would say, 'Oh no, he knows nothing about our religious habits and all the rest of it.'

Parsiana: Have you studied the religion at any time?

Wadia: Not really. I would not say I have studied it. I follow it.

Parsiana: What do you feel are its outstanding points? What attracts you to the religion?

Wadia: Well, I think it's a good religion. It's reasonable, simple, straightforward, and it teaches people what they should do, what is correct, what are the good things to do, and I think all the teachings



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of Zoroaster are as good as anybody else's. In fact it has a great deal in common with the Christian religion. One of the few differences is that the Christians believe Christ is the son of God and the Parsis believe Zoroaster was a prophet. As for the teachings—very similar.

Parsiana: Are you an ardent and orthodox Christian?

Wadia: No, I wouldn't say so. My father was, naturally, being the first to become one out of conviction. I believe in it. I belong to the Church of England. I believe in that very much. It is a very nice religion because it leaves you in peace. You go to church when you want to. You follow whatever you like. It's entirely upto you. And therefore you practise your religion when you feel the urge, the need, the desire to go and say thanks. You can practise it when you feel like. I think that's very good. I don't like religions which are dogmatic, which say you have to do this and you have to do that.

Parsiana: Do you feel there is a conflict in your admiration for both Zoroaster and Christ?

Wadia: No, I don't feel any conflict at all.

Parsiana: What motivated your father to turn to Christianity?

Wadia: Well he went to St. Xavier's. I think he was very impressed by the teachings of the fathers there. They're very devoted and very fine people. No question about that. And he must have thought they had something in their religion, because they were doing so many good things. They are very admirable people.

Parsiana: Did his parents object to his converting?

Wadia: Oh yes! My grandmother did, of course. He changed his religion after my grandfather died. He died at an early age, about 1904. He was around 30 years of age.

Parsiana: Did you consider going back to the Zoroastrian faith?

Wadia: Well I've never thought about it. When I was a young man it would have been frowned upon and I might have had a lot of difficulty doing it if I had wanted to. But I'm perfectly satisfied with the Church of England, and I like it. I love the services

and the music, it has a lot to commend it.

Parsiana: Would you have insisted upon your own children following any one religion?

Wadia: I brought them up in the same one as I'm in. They are all Christians belonging to the Church of England. There's a little church on Malabar Hill. If they wanted to change I wouldn't have any objection. I'd caution them about changing. But I wouldn't go any further than that.

Parsiana: If you were eligible for the Parsi Panchayat for whatever reason would you choose to run as a trustee?

Wadia: If I was eligible, I think I might. Yes, why not? Earlier perhaps, but not now as I feel I am getting on in years. I think they should have a little younger blood in the Parsi Panchayat. They should have some good young people, bringing energy and so on.

Parsiana: Do you think the Panchayat is doing a good job?

Wadia: I don't think they are active enough and doing things.

(Continued on page 34)

Parsiana

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Do You Prefer The Pugree Or Fetah?

Interviews by Feroza Paymaster

Always glad to keep a controversy alive and to further divide the community, Parsiana has chosen for this issue one of the most controversial subjects going—that of headgear. Below are the questions we put to our seven interviewees as well as the answers given by Piloo Mody, MP (see Editor's Column)

Q: Which do you prefer: the pugree or the fetah?

A: Pugree.

Q: Why? Is it more aesthetically pleasing, comfortable, durable?

A: Adds to my height.

Q: Which do you or your family traditionally wear?

A: Pugree.

Q: On what occasions do you wear it? When do you feel it should be worn?

A: Navjotes, Marriages, Deaths.

Q: Does it enhance the looks of the wearer? Is it masculine? Which is more masculine?

A: Yes. Yes. Pugree.

Q: Does your head pain when you wear it?

A: No, I never wear it long enough.

Q: When did you have your first one made? (or when did your spouse, brother or son have their first one made?) For what occasion?

A: Navjote.

Q: Do you have more than one?

A: Yes.

Q: Why is there a gap at the top of the pugree?

A: Obviously for ventilation.

Q: Are the fetah and pugree going out of style?

A: It would appear so.

Q: Could you suggest any modifications to popularize it: change in colour, different material, modifications for greater comfort ...?



A: I used to prefer the ones made in the old days out of heavy silk.

Q: Do you feel it should remain as it is?

A: Perhaps.

Sheryar Ookerjee, 49, Professor of Philosophy, Wilson College



"I have both and I wear both—not simultaneously of course. The fetah I inherited from my father, the pugree I had made for my wedding. I prefer the pugree. It allows for greater variety." The slit on the pugree could have been provided for scratching; "maybe it is an itchy part of the head." The pugree, Ookerjee feels, is not masculine in appearance but it gives more dignity. "Much depends on the kind of face one has. Mine I don't think it enhances."

The fetah, Ookerjee says, is more comfortable, "the pugree cuts

into your forehead." The fetah is also more durable, "it protects the head more." Ookerjee notes that the fetah and pugree are going out of style. "Most community caps are being given up, it is a global phenomenon. I think people have realized that having hair on the head is enough. However, Parsis did not wear it for protection, but for religious reasons. I have known of Parsis who wouldn't have a bath without their caps on. Hair was supposed to be unclean. Even the ancient Greeks considered hair and nails dirty."

Jeroo Irani, 28, Beautician



"It is difficult to say, but I think I would prefer the fetah. It looks better." Jeroo feels it is "masculine and more comfortable." Both last equally long though, because "they are not used that much. They are going out of fashion. So few wear it regularly. I wonder if our generation will continue wearing them, and if our children will wear them at all, unless they are religious minded." People wear them for ceremonies and "then they just lie." Her husband's fetah has

been mostly in the cupboard, "since the time he wore it for our wedding." He had it made because "you have to have it". He wears it occasionally "with a duglee. At funerals he dons a cap."

Jeroo is not aware what the slit on top of the pugree is for. As for the colours she says "black and dark grey are good colours for both the pugree and the fetah, but maybe the fetah should be made a little taller."

Dinshaw Desai, 60, Accountant, Patuck Institute



"I go for the pugree. My forefathers have been wearing it, and I feel that a person with an average height like myself looks better in a pugree. Shorter men look better in fetah." The pugree, Desai feels also enhances one's looks and makes one look more masculine. As for comfort he feels "it depends on individual cases. I think the fetah is more comfortable, but I have never worn it. If you wear the pugree for long, three-quarters of an hour, your head does pain, and you

have to change the position."

Desai had his pugree made for his navjote, but he started wearing one when he was about twenty-one years old. "My father always wore a pugree, but all my brothers wear the fetah." His children, he feels, will go in for the fetah, "they don't like the pugree." Desai believes the pugree is made of cardboard, "cloth is wrapped around it and then it is polished." The gap in the top is to ensure that "air goes in, and you don't feel hot," he notes.



Mani Karkaria, 42, Housewife

"I prefer the fetah. I personally feel that it makes one look so much younger. It is comfortable, lighter and less expensive. It is also more masculine. And it looks original. The pugree resembles the headgear of the Sindhis, which is also wrapped up. It enhances the looks of some people though.

"My husband, father and brothers all wear or used to wear the fetah. Only one brother has a pugree. My husband wears the fetah to weddings, navjotes and funerals. We must wear our traditional dress at least on such occasions. The slit in the top is

for ventilation. I have seen people put hankies in the gap. It must be stuffy." Ms Karkaria feels the fetah must be uncomfortable because her husband takes it off occasionally. "At first I had to hold it for him, so I told him why do you bring it at all?" The fetah and pugree are going out of style, says Ms Karkaria. "It is a bad thing, I feel the Parsi dress should remain. The colour of the pugree and fetah should remain the same since it is for men. The shape of the fetah is very nice. The shape of the pugree can be adjusted according to the height of the person but otherwise it should remain as it is."



Ratu Meher-Homji, 29, Ticket and Reservation Agent, Ethiopian Airlines

"I am very anti-fetah. I think it looks like a box. The pugree is more elegant looking, comfortable, and I prefer it. The pugree is not something that can be worn for five to six hours though, I think it is painful. The pugree is also called a letter box because of the gap on top, which is probably provided for ventilation."

The pugree, Ratu feels, "makes a man look more manly but with the Parsi dress, of course. It enhances and complements the duglees. However, today people usually wear suits and the pugree is only worn once every five years

or so. The pugree and fetah are going out of style. They are the last relics of our ancient dress and I would not want them to fade away."

"The fetah is made of felt with a hard base," says Ratu. "I believe it is sometimes red too, but only the priestly class can wear that. I would like to see the fetah in red, with the shape remaining as it is. The pugree takes a long time to make."

In her own family, her husband wears the pugree to weddings and funerals. "He borrowed it when we got married and he still doesn't have one of his own."



Pheroze Madon, 22, Student

"Which one is which?" he asked. After being told, Pheroze said he preferred the pugree. "It is what my dad wears to weddings and funerals and I am very used to looking at it. I do not wear either. I prefer the skull cap, it is much cooler. If I had to wear one of them, it would be the pugree. I suppose I'll have to when I get married, but nobody has insisted so far." He does not think either of them enhances one's looks or makes the person

appear more masculine. If anything he feels "it is cumbersome to carry around and look after."

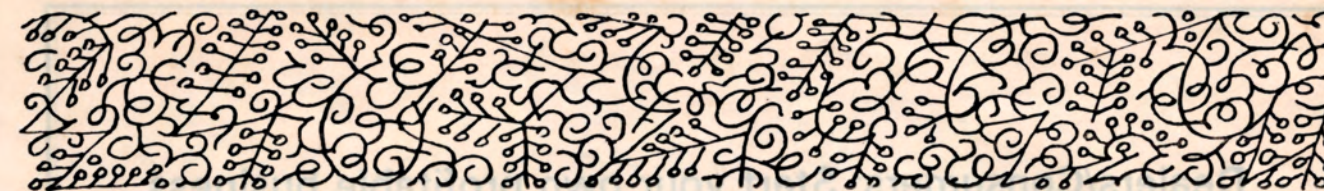
The pugree Pheroze feels "is quite mod looking and has a unique shape. I think the fetah and pugree should remain as they are. I don't know what the pugree is made of, I think it is velvet, newspaper, lacquer, cloth and starch." The slit in the pugree permits the skull cap to be removed. "I saw it being done in a play."



Mehra Ruttonsha, 72, Housewife

"I like both but it depends on what suits whom." The pugree suits "well built and tall people. The fetah, medium sized people." Ms Ruttonsha's husband wears the fetah and her brother, the pugree. The pugree, according to her, makes a man look more masculine. "Years back, boys wore the fetah and pugree by the time they were 22-23 years old. But today my son doesn't have either, although he is 40. He says 'Where do we use it? People don't wear it they carry it in their hands. People go to weddings in suits.' To the fire temple he wears a *topi* with the *duglee*."

"Iranis wear red fetahs, so do some Parsi families—it is their mark of distinction. There is variety in the pugree. Some are black, others maroon, though the latter is very rare." The pugree is made of "some sort of glazed cloth with printed dots." The slit in the top "must be for air". However, people used it "for storing their snuff boxes and spectacle cases." There was a funny song about the pugree which said that "the pugree had bugs." Its origin she attributes to the possibility that "people wore their pugrees till they were really dirty."



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THE SOUND OF SILENCE

by Pervin Mahoney

Twenty-seven fraught years of precarious existence ended this July when *Parsi Avaz* joined the sad fraternity of dead journals. Fervently devoted to the cause of propagating the esoteric Zoroastrian philosophy called *Ilm-e-Kshnum*, the eight-page Gujarati weekly lived for only nine months after the death in October 1973 of its founder, Jehangirji Chiniwala. For those last months it has been edited by 47-year-old Kaikhushru Dastoor, who managed to combine this time-consuming vocation with a fulltime career as Legal Officer with a leading bank. Now a stoical smile failed to cover his dismay as he reflected on the reactions to its closure.

"I have drawers full of letters from people demanding 'Why has it closed down?' People seemed to have a sort of spiritual intoxication for it. At the end of the week they thirsted for it. It was just like craving a drink. People actually came here"—he gestured to the bustling open-plan office high above Bombay's Nariman Point—"and wept."

Yet, in spite of these demonstrations of solidarity, the number of subscribers shrank inexorably. "At the beginning we had started with 3,000 copies. Gradually this dwindled to 900 and finally fell as low as 600. Towards the end we were losing three or four thousand rupees a year.

"People READ *Parsi Avaz* but they wouldn't SUBSCRIBE to it"; that was the only bitter comment that Dastoor let slip during the two-hour post-mortem. "And yet—it's quite a paradox—many of our readers faithfully filed our back numbers. People still come here and ask for old copies to file. We once worked out that one copy was read by seven people."

Dastoor has lost none of his original zeal, though he joined the paper as far back as 1950. Of those early years he whispered gleefully, so that one didn't know whether to take him seriously or not, "I even used to write the Women's and Children's Columns!"



Dastoor: Spiritual intoxication

While the followers of *Ilm-e-Kshnum* claim that it is the mystical core of Zoroastrianism, its detractors allege that its aim is mystification rather than mysticism. Dastoor leaned forward and explained with intent relish, "*Ilm* means knowledge, *e* is a suffix meaning of, and *Kshnum* is an Avestic word which means ecstasy—spiritual ecstasy. Our beliefs are not theories—they are the truth! *Ilm-e-Kshnum* is not a school of thought, it's the authentic heart of Zoroastrianism."

The founder of the movement was Behramshah Naoroji Shroff, who was born in Surat in 1857. So many strange stories circulate about him that it is difficult to distinguish fact from fiction, which prompted Dastoor to preface his account of Shroff's life with the cautionary comment, "Perhaps you will be surprised." Then, with a true lawyer's gift of the gab, he began his narrative: "By the time Behramshah was thirteen, he was a written-off child. He was not much good at school; he had a quick temper and was prone to throw tantrums; and to top it all he was *bobro*—a pathetic stammerer. One day he quarrelled violently with his mother and ran off to his uncle's (*mama's*) home in Peshawar, taking a free ride on the Frontier Mail. This happened around 1875. After letting his mother know that he was safe, his

uncle allowed him the freedom to wander wherever he pleased.

"One day, as Behramshah was doing his *kusti* in the hills, a figure like a *jabardast moto dastoor* appeared before him. He convinced Behramshah into going with him to a remote spot in the Demavand mountains. This was the dwelling place of the Saheb Dilan Clan, consisting of two or three thousand Parsi sages. They were Parsi yogis—*aabed*, from which is derived our present word *mobed*. Behramshah passed through certain ordeals and was considered worthy of being taught. He remained here for three years, till the chief sage, Srosha-Varez Murzban, informed him that it was time to go into the world again. Some day he would be told when to start teaching. Till then he must remain silent." Putting his hands to his lips, Dastoor paused strategically, as if to whet one's appetite for more.

"So one evening as his uncle was sitting with a drink and his *punkho* he saw this huge venerable figure with an enormous beard. Of course, he did not recognize Behramshah, and was astounded to discover who it was; everyone had thought the Pathans had abducted him. What's more, Behramshah's stammer had disappeared.

"For twenty-five years Behramshah did not breathe a word about his experiences. Then he received the sign to start. As he was wondering how to begin his mission, he noticed a small group of Parsi boys deep in discussion, presided over by the headmaster of Surat's Mission School, Munchers Shah Kaikobad. It so happened that Munchers Shah had long been in search of a guru; in Behramshah he found one. From those small beginnings started *Ilm-e-Kshnum*.

"In 1905 there was a Zoroastrian conference at which all the usual reformist questions were asked—yes, the same questions were being asked then too!—such as why can't *agiaries* be put to more useful purposes, like storing grain. Actually, one can't answer

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these questions logically unless one believes that an *agiary* has a mystical significance. So Behramshah was invited to answer such questions. Some scholars tended to run away from his views—to try and ignore this new development—because they felt he was merely emphasizing rituals and was on the side of the orthodox, whereas they considered themselves to be bringing modern rational methods to bear on religious questions.

"But K. R. Cama, who was a pioneer in applying Western methods of research to Oriental studies, began to believe in him, and to tell his pupils that Behramshah had the real *chavi* to many problems. About Behramshah's interpretation of a key-word, Cama had once exclaimed, 'My doubts on this word vanished like lightning.'"

According to Dastoor, Ilm-e-Kshnum has corrected Western scholars' faulty interpretations of the writings of Zoroastrianism. "For instance, chapter one of the *Vendidad* talks of sixteen cities. Western scholars had thought these were real flesh-and-blood cities; when they found that they did not tally with geography and map-making, they dismissed this portion as incorrect. Actually this is a mystical reference. The sixteen cities are the sixteen plexi (or what the Hindus call *chakra*) of an astral body. In addition to the *ruvan* or soul, each individual has three such astral bodies—which no doctor will find on an operation table. These kind of differences in interpretation are of great importance; often they affect one's whole understanding of the *Gathas*. You see, the *chasmo* which Western scholars wear is quite different... Similarly, Ilm-e-Kshnum teaches the true significance of other matters like the *sudra-kusti* and the mantric effect of prayers, which most *mobeds* today know nothing about. My grandfather used to spend two hours over a particular prayer—and his concentration was so great that he would not know if a bomb burst."

Two of Behramshah's disciples were chosen to propagate the faith, the brothers Framroze and Jehangir Chiniwala. This was the purpose of *Parsi Avaz*. But now that this voice is stilled, what medium

is left to convey the message of Ilm-e-Kshnum? Dastoor has a number of alternatives in mind. "I've made a study of Dr. Framroze Chiniwala's works; he wrote a tremendous amount on Ilm-e-Kshnum, a lot of which has been published and a lot of which ought to be published." Modestly he added, "And I myself have given thirteen or fourteen lectures between February and April. I approach my subject from the standpoint of modern rational knowledge, so that my audience isn't put off by what they might consider mumbo-jumbo. My own background is rational—my field is the law, and also I've always been interested in atomic physics."

He fished out a copy of *Scientific American* and opened it to an article which at a cursory glance seemed to suggest that an electron accelerator—"Do you realize, it would stretch from here to Dhobi Talao?"—had helped to discover that the ultimate composition of protons and neutrons were "point-like entities. This assertion about point-like entities was made more than thirty years ago in Chiniwala's writing!" Dastoor exclaimed. Of course, the same inspired guess had also been made two thousand years ago by a Greek named Demokritus.

The importance of Ilm-e-Kshnum lies in its being a genuinely Zoroastrian way of filling a gap which had hitherto been filled by theosophy or yoga—or, at present, by Parsis taking up such offspring of Hindu philosophy as Transcendental Meditation, the Hare Krishna movement or the Divine Light Mission. "Behramshah's teachings revived the Parsi community at a time when Western attitudes were eating away at our religion." Perhaps the closure of *Parsi Avaz* was pre-ordained, because Behramshah had warned that the time was not yet ripe for a full-scale mystical Zoroastrian revival. Dastoor noted with baffling faith, "Jehangirji Chiniwala used to say that someone always helped him. And it was true—when he really didn't know where to turn, he always used to get help. And now, after *Parsi Avaz* has closed, I have had many offers from people saying that they would help financially in starting some other

(Continued on page 40, col. 3)

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Parsi Pioneer: Sorabjee Bengalee

The material for this article was sent by Jamshed R. Pavri from Canada. Parsiana Associate Editor Pervin Mahoney interviewed people in Bombay and visited several institutions to gather supporting information. She collated the story using Pavri's notes and her own. (Sketch by Manjula Padmanabhan.)

In a quiet corner of Bombay's Oval Maidan stands an imposing marble statue. The grass nearby is sparse and worn from the footsteps of generations of passers-by, but the statue's fate consists more in being hurried past than in being looked at. Like all memorials, this figure of Sorabjee Bengalee has become a natural part of the city's landscape. His gown billows eternally, whether the wind drops or rises; the proud face looks upward in the same direction as it has done for 74 years. Already erosion has begun, gnawing in sepia at the creamy marble. But fortunately other, more alive memorials to Sorabjee Bengalee exist—notably the institutions he was instrumental in creating in Bombay.

Bengalee came from an adventurous family. His grandfather, Nowrojee Umrigar, was one of the first Parsis to go to Calcutta—hence the surname Bengalee—and one of the pioneers of the trade with China, making three business trips there. A deeply pious man, he had a Tower of Silence erected in Calcutta in 1822. He left two sons—Shapurjee (Sorabjee's father) and Dadabhoy. Together they built a *Sagri* in 1832 near the Tower of Silence constructed by their father.

Shapurjee also made two successful business trips to China. Then came a sudden change in the family's fortunes. Nowrojee's share in the firm of Hutton & Company was lost when that firm collapsed, and the family house in Bombay's Parsi Bazaar was all that remained for Shapurjee. Before he could

restore the family's finances, Shapurjee died; he was only 25, and his son Sorabjee was 15 months old.

Sorabjee did not enjoy a silver-spoon-in-the-mouth start in life. Instead of a formal higher education, he had to start work at the age of 14 as a clerk in the Commercial Bank. From there he moved to the newly started Mercantile Bank and within a year was made Deputy Accountant, a position until then only held by Englishmen. However, beyond this position Sorabjee could not advance—Indians were just not eligible for higher appointments. Luckily the chance for getting out of this rut came when he was offered a post with a private banker, who was guarantee broker to Messrs. W. A. Graham & Company. This was a turning-point in his business life, for Graham's soon asked for his services and his rise was, as they say, meteoric. He became Graham's guarantee broker, made numerous trips abroad, established a branch at Calcutta and was finally asked by Mr. William Graham to start a London branch.

While establishing himself as a businessman, he was also gaining stature in public life. His resentment at having had to leave school before finishing his education aroused in him a thirst for knowledge. "His education began when it had apparently ended," says his biographer, Nowrojee Sorabjee Bengalee. Till well past 50 he tackled, turn by turn, books on banking and currency, religion and religious research, logic and moral philosophy, English literature, history, economics, archaeology, French and Persian. His curtailed schooling also gave him a desire to help others acquire education. So when the students of Elphinstone College, under the chairmanship of Dadabhoy Naoroji, formed a committee with the object of imparting education to women, Sorabjee's imagination was fired.

The committee established two Marathi and four Gujarati part-time schools with volunteer teachers. Sorabjee Bengalee was one of the 15 Parsis on the Book Committee which brought out three graded readers entitled *Gyan Bodhak*.

His interest in publishing awakened, he started two ventures, both monthly journals, *Jagat Mitra*, started in 1850, was devoted to progress and reform, furnishing the Gujarati reader with some of the latest Western thought; *Jagat Premi*, started in 1851, attempted to re-educate Parsis about the magnificence of ancient Iran, and ran articles on architecture, sculpture and archaeological finds. For two years he was also editor—without any pay—of Dadabhoy Naoroji's progressive bi-weekly *Rast Goftar* which, week after week, attacked the evils of the day. Typical targets were child marriage, the ignorance of the priesthood, and the lack of female education and female freedom (women only drove in closed carriages and never attended public functions). After some time Karsandas Mulji, a Hindu reformer and writer, joined in the proprietorship of the *Rast Goftar*, adding great weight to the movement for reform.

Of course, Bengalee's own interests were not confined solely to the Parsi community. He was one of the founders—and a vocal figure—of the Bombay Association formed in 1852 by Bombayites of all communities and religions to look into the governmental and educational needs of Bombay's citizens. Several briefs were presented to the Bombay government and sent to England, calling for the improvement of the conditions then prevailing.

One of the noteworthy activities of the Bombay Association was its fight against the Trade and Profession Tax proposed by the Government of India. Bengalee was a staunch opponent of this levy.



However, one Pestonjee Byramjee Dantra suggested that the government should instead levy a tax on marriages and other religious ceremonies like *Navjote*, baptism, and *Janoi* thread ceremony, calculating that this would bring Rs. 26.7 million a year to the Treasury. This appeared to find favour with the government, but income-tax was introduced instead and all debate came to an end.

Bengalee was Secretary of a Samast Anjuman meeting called to discuss important issues arising out of age-old Parsi customs, especially succession and inheritance laws. After almost six years of discussion, the matter was finally referred to the India Office in London by a Commission appointed by the Government of Bombay in 1861, recommending special treatment to the Parsi community. The Commission's recommendations subsequently became effective law.

Bengalee was instrumental in creating more than one school for Parsi girls in Bombay. He stimulated Cawasjee Jehangir Ready-money to establish in 1859 a school at Khetwadi for Parsi girls, which he supervised until 1864. He also informed the Director of Public Education of the necessity of a girls' school near Thakurwar, offering to meet half the cost; and in 1873 a school was established next to Banaji's *Atash-Behram*, with Sorabjee providing furniture, maps, books and other materials at his expense.

Once, when he received an unexpected profit from a certain transaction, believing it was expressly given to him for the purpose he loved so much, he decided to build a girls' school in memory of his mother. Obtaining land and financial aid worth Rs. 36,835 from the Government, he himself met the remaining cost of Rs. 66,787. The Bai Bhikhaijee Shapurjee Bengalee School was opened in 1885 and stood at the end of Goga Street. In 1952 it moved to its new building at 42 New Marine Lines. Today the school has 768 pupils, from Kindergarten to High School.

Through all the changes of the years, notes the principal Ms Khorshed Pavri, the school has never lost sight of Sorabjee's main aim—that of giving girls domestic as well as literary training, so that they would be educated and also be useful members of their households.

Sorabjee Bengalee was the very first person invited to give his views when a commission was appointed by the government to investigate and report on the educational system prevailing in India. Almost all his recommendations were recognised.

Bengalee entered politics when the management of the Bombay Municipality was changed. Upto then it had been managed by a group of Justices of the Peace. Now a total of 64 corporators was formed: 32 were elected by property-tax payers, 16 were J.P.s, and the remaining 16 were Government nominees. Among the 64 corporators 16 were Parsis: 10 elected, five J.P.s, and one nominated. Sorabjee was elected from the Fort area. Soon afterwards

he was appointed a Trustee of the Bombay Port. When the Prince of Wales laid the foundation stone of Princess Dock, the ceremony was performed according to masonic rites. Among the representatives of the English and Scottish lodges were a large number of Parsis. A silver tablet has inscribed on it Bengalee's name as one of the Port Trustees.

When Queen Victoria became Empress of India, a meeting of the leading Parsis of Bombay was called at Bombay Castle, Jamshedjee Jeejeebhoy's residence, for preparing a message of congratulations. All Parsi homes and business establishments were to be gaily illuminated. Bengalee was a leading member of the committee which drew up the congratulatory memorandum, which was then approved by a Samast Anjuman meeting, signed by the Parsi residents and dispatched to the Queen. He also got a special banner of the Bombay Municipal Corporation prepared in England under the direction of Mr. Pedder, a previous municipal commissioner of Bom-

bay, and presented to the city of Bombay in 1876.

This was an eventful year, for he was first appointed a member of the Governor's Legislative Council of Bombay, then he was made Sheriff of Bombay, and finally he received the title C.I.E.

Together with one Mr. Cartledge, he started a fund with a dual purpose in mind: to invite a lady doctor from England in order to open a clinic for women and children and also, if possible, to give medical instruction to female medical students at Grant Medical College. Forty thousand rupees were collected and shortly afterwards Pestonjee Hormusjee Camajee donated Rs. 120,000 to the Government for the purchase of land and the building of a hospital, as well as Rs. 15,000 for nurses' quarters. Land was bought next to Elphinstone High School; Dr. Miss Edith Peachy, M.D., was called to Bombay to be in charge of the hospital—now the Cama and Albless Hospital on Cruikshank Road (Mahapalika Marg).

(Continued on page 39)

The Panchayat Elections

By Dr. P. B. Warden

Founder Editor of Parsiana



I have been struggling for the last several years to correct our anomalous and archaic election system. In the August 1973 issue of *Parsiana* I wrote an outline of my ideas for modernising the scheme under the title *Akhand Parsa*—a consolidated group of Parsis who should be able to replace the fossils and restrain the upstarts from getting into full control of the election, which by now has degenerated into a mechanical arithmetical formula.

This formula allows the election of a trustee to be made by 380 people, half of whom obtain the right to vote not through any democratic process but by paying Rs. 5,000 to the Panchayat as a donation.

And unless and until the franchise is broadened to include a wide circle of able and eminent personages who at present go unrepresented, what future can we expect from a restricted and controlled electoral college which, barring some exceptions, consists of men and women whose vision of the future cannot by any means be regarded as sound or even sensible.

The stark fact is that the Parsi Panchayat Trustee election is a controlled system which negates the accepted principle of any election—namely the element of chance. That can be taken away by manipulation.

If a person exercises his independence the trained dogs howl to drown his voice. If he stays put as a wall-flower he achieves nothing and belies the expectations of the community. Our Panchayat becomes a body sworn to maintain the *status quo*.

A little before the election of the electoral college of 1974 two former members of the Anjuman Paksh, asked me to join their

Independent Orthodox party noting that as I had stood first in the last electoral college I would surely be re-elected and welcome. It was a sporting offer. We all three were orthodox by temperament. But I could not understand what Independent Orthodox meant. Did it mean that the candidate could stay or leave orthodoxy as he liked? Then I as an unqualified orthodox was more stable and therefore superior.

As I was against this system of election based on extremely restricted franchise by a handful of voters, there was no sense in my joining any group as any real work to be done is with the community. Till then Ms Noble's manifesto was not out and Doongerwadi was not named a protected area by any declaration, manifesto or edict. I never knew any man nor do I know any man upto this day who intended harming Doongerwadi. Cremation was and remains only a demand, which cannot be granted, and those demanding it are harmless people sitting aside. Burial was first proposed by another harmless person and not by any trustee. The issue of Doongerwadi was raised for propaganda purposes and it served its purpose well.

To protect one's own religion is the duty of every person. One need not arrogate to oneself a monopoly and misuse it to make way for a trusteeship. Does not one know that the Parsi Panchayat is not a Sacerdotal Holy Order; it is an administrative office only, having no jurisdiction over religion. The Panchayat manages schools, housing colonies, finances, charities, etc., but not a single *atash behram* or *agiar* or any other place of Zoroastrian worship. Doongerwadi has fallen into its lap and the trustees manage it, and as all managing trustees have

some privileges so have they, but they are not of a religious order. They refer all religious disputes to the *dastoorjis* and give directions accordingly not because they are religious heads but because they have some privileges as aforesaid, nothing more.

Now coming to our two-stage election, the first stage is the electoral college. In this hopelessly archaic system, the electorate body appoints a trustee. Obviously this type of preliminary body should, preferably, consist of persons of status and education, who have the capacity to assess the qualifications of a trustee-to-be, and not a biased lot of blind leading the blind. Such people may do untold harm, especially if they are prone to confusing administration with religion. The demands of administration and religion are entirely unconnected and they must be kept apart. While religion is emotionally tinged, administration implies a deeper sense of reality. Though life needs both, each has its own separate sphere. The roots of devastation are already sown when, by some subterfuge, the 'E' register becomes a biased group having only one set idea to work on, which could be handled by any one person or clique to serve his or her end. This tends to prevent the best elements in a society from expressing or implementing their ideas and, worse still, to incorporate average and sub-average minds to direct the destiny of the community for the next ten years. Look at the new 'E' Register. Mr. Homi Banaji is excluded, with only two votes. Mr. Jamshed D. Kapadia—a Senior Wrangler with a Mathematical Tripos from Cambridge University—cannot fit in with lower-grade thinkers. The Register, however, finds room for

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43, Mahatma Gandhi Road, Ghatkopar (East).

several clerks, *gumastas* and typists; its motto seems to be to keep out quality and take on enough inferior material to make up the required number of 'E' register members.

On election day I met many voters from the opposite camp who freely talked to me. Some asked me why I competed when I had no chance of winning and even when my party, the Anjuman Paksh, announced in the paper that party members should not vote. Before and even on election day people told me it would look awkward if I got very few votes. I answered "I am thick-skinned and I am not competing to win, but I am keen that the community should have its eyes opened and see how thoughtless and absurd our voting system is, compartmentalized and pigeon-holed in design and execution. Doves just go in and sit for seven years as electoral college members and flutter their wings only on election day to elect a trustee." Ms Noble's election manifesto was based on the 'Doongerwadi In Danger' formula. I showed that people do not vote for future planning but for a worthless sentimental sweep. Doongerwadi is only a theoretical dispute. The law has already settled it. The less votes I get the better. This can bring out

the contradictions underlying the controlled election, which is thus bound to keep deserving candidates from seeking election.

Behind every evil there lurks some unfathomed good. If my defeat brings home to the community the need for some urgent changes, it will have served my purpose in bringing about a change in the pattern of the electorate from an unconscious emotional control of the crowd to conscious constructive control by individuals. This way the defeat may yield a grand slam or at least a little slam. We may thus go one stage further in thinking about our future seriously and electing the right type of trustees.

In my circular to all members of 'E' and 'F' registers I have clearly stated that my opponent was unsuited for trusteeship and so was I, and if by chance I was elected, once the community found the right type of person I would walk out within a week.

What is our election worth, with total control of 'E' register on one hand and its parity in number with 'F' register on the other—when it is known that certain individuals control a certain number of 'F' register votes? There is no room for reasoning

or argument with these individuals as I have personally experienced during my canvassing campaign for Mr. Ratan Pochkhanawala, whose candidature I had sponsored. Mr. Pochkhanawala and I have—by and large, barring healthy exceptions—a very sad memory of the calibre of this electorate and also of the then 'E' register. Truly, it is such experiences which have made me champion the cause for change in our election system. The present 'E' register is obsessed with Doongerwadi. With elected representatives playing to the gallery the next trustee in order to be eligible to compete will need a No Objection Certificate from Boman-Behram and Ms Noble or keep out.

My action has the approval of many thinking and mature minds. My intention and my hope has been stated above. I shall patiently wait for its fulfillment; wait not passively but work actively—with, I hope, the help and support of my community—for my programme of *Akhand Parsa* and for implementing my manifesto, whether as candidate one is elected or not. I look upon any manifesto as a deceitful document if it is not intended to be implemented whether or not a candidate succeeds in the election.

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THE FLIGHT OF THE BUSYBEE

Review and 'Interview' by Geeta Doctor

"And if there were a hundred Busybees" reads the blurb to his book, "they would be welcome for the spot of sunshine they bring into the hearts of his 100,000 readers." The writing has all the hallmarks of his style—the sentence starting with "And", the note of lyrical exaggeration and the cliché that will hit his 100,000 readers right in the centre of their humdrum hearts and have them crying, "Busybee, c'est moi!"

There is no doubt about the popularity of Busybee as a columnist. He does for the tired, battle-weary Bombayman in the evening, what Laxman's cartoon does for him in the morning—gives his spirits a lift by administering a spoonful of the "Smile! Things couldn't get worse!" philosophy. Immediately Mr. Bombayman feels better, there is a shine in his eye, he begins to breathe easier and is able to go home with the comforting thought that somebody out there understands him. Not surprisingly the next evening he is ready to have some more of the same syrup.

There is however a difference between a spoonful of syrup and a whole bottle of it, and that is the difference between reading one column of Busybee and an entire collection of them as we do in his book, which is naturally entitled, "Round and About". One sympathises with the desire to pin down the daily columns into a more permanent resting place than the quickly forgotten pages of a newspaper and to this extent we should be grateful to the publishers. They have extracted the best out of Busybee, labelled the contents into separate sections which tell us what Busybee has had to say about Cricket, Politics, Cinema and so on, laced each section up with a whiff of "Mario" and made Busybee available not only to posterity but to all those unfortunate souls who do not read *The Evening News* or *The Times Weekly*.

A bottled Busybee, however,

does not have the charm of the real one, flitting lightly as he does from place to place, giving us a bee's eye view of a Test match, or visiting an Udipi restaurant or peering through the eyes of an urchin as the Big Top goes up at the Azad Maidan. He has a genius for picking up those small moments in time which flash momentarily into consciousness and then are seen no more. This is what makes him so successful as a daily columnist and less so as the author of a book. For, what seemed important yesterday appears trivial in the light of today and to insist otherwise is to fall into the trap of sentimentality. It is a trap into which, in his book, Busybee often falls and seldom flies out of, for he lacks the ability of a Thurber to take an incident out of its particular context and blow it up into an experience of universal significance. Thus, when Thurber writes of "The day the dam broke," his readers need not know which dam it was or why it broke, for the sense of impending doom which he communicates is already lurking in their subconscious and they are able to share the hysteria and panic that he evokes in his hilarious retelling of the event. Busybee's traumas are small localised affairs of relevance to a particular public at a particular time. Thus, unless one is an old Bombay hand, it is of little interest whether the Excelsior will survive as a theatre or not and certainly one is scarcely interested in knowing what Mr. J. B. D'Souza is planning to do for the Twin City unless one has had some knowledge of the controversy connected with it. Of course not all his anecdotes are restricted in scope, but generally the pleasure that one gets in reading them is more from a vague recollection of a known event than the sudden recognition of an unknown one.

On top of this while going through longer stretches of Busybee one cannot help but become conscious of the stylistic tricks

that he employs with the persistence of a buzzing bee; the most noticeable one being the already mentioned fondness for sentences starting with an "And". The more sentimental he gets the more "Ands" he uses so that his language takes on a sobbing quality, an impression which is reinforced by his constant glorification of the poor, the sick and the lonely. Together with his fondness for conjunctive paragraphs, he combines what can only be described as the breathless sentence, or a sentence in which he hangs a string of clauses tied up with a main verb which finally creeps in at the end.

At his best however he can command a spare, simple style à la Hemingway, which is excellently suited to the simple Indian scenarios that he creates. It is especially good in conversations and the best part of Busybee are his imaginary dialogues, either with famous people, or with his supercilious dog, Bolshoi, or with members of his Dagwoodian family. He is able to capture just the right tone of high seriousness that is needed to make the most inconsequential events sound like matters of prime importance.

No discussion on Busybee can be complete without a reference to Art Buchwald. Faithful readers of the American columnist always feel obliged to appear outraged at Busybee's similarity to him. The resemblance is superficial, like saying that since both men wear black rimmed spectacles they look alike. Busybee may use a format similar to Buchwald, but he has his own distinctive style. Whereas Buchwald uses wit, Busybee employs sentiment, which is to say that whereas Buchwald uses his head, Busybee uses his heart. It is this quality of his that has sent him buzzing into the hearts of his readers and made him, despite all his shortcomings, a household word.

WHAT'S THE BUZZ

The other day I met Busybee.

It all happened very suddenly. There was a faint buzzing in the air. Someone whispered "That's Mr. Busybee. He works for the *Times of India* you know." I turned. And there he was.

"Oh my God!" I thought, "he's not so young. No wonder he saw all those movies at the Excelsior before it was pulled down."

"I would never have recognised you," I said with a smile.

"Oh that's alright" said Busybee. "I'm in disguise." He was wearing a faded pair of denim pants and matching shirt. His hair looked as though it had been liberally sprinkled with talcum powder. His face looked young.

"Come to think of it you look just like those cartoons of you by Mario," I said.

"He's not a bad artist," replied Busybee.

"Would you mind giving me an interview?" I asked. Whereupon his dog Bolshoi the Boxer who

had been silently listening to the conversation turned his face away in disgust "Oh no!" he said.

"What's with him?" I asked, fascinated for I had never seen a Boxer who talked before.

"He doesn't like journalists," explained Busybee.

"It's just that I don't believe in communal magazines" growled Bolshoi. "I don't like the idea of creating subdivisions within subdivisions. How would you like it if I bought out a magazine only for Boxers. What I'm looking for is a strong united India."

"He's a very patriotic dog," said Busybee apologetically.

"Well it's enough if you give me the interview," I said.

"Anytime" said Busybee.

"What's your opinion of Art Buchwald?" I asked.

"Who's that?" replied Busybee.

"Oh you know he's the guy who used to write in *The Herald Tribune* and whose column gets reprinted in *The Hindu*. You know he's got this fantastic sense of humour. He never fails to pull a punch in the last line. It really kills you."

"Oh him," said Busybee with considerable lack of enthusiasm. "He's not too bad. But you know he's not really an American or a Jew either. And he's not married and those kids he's always writing about are not real either."

"Would you quit knocking a fellow journalist," said Bolshoi. "Next you'll be saying that he doesn't have a dog either."

"I'm sorry," said Busybee. "The funny thing is that people often say that he writes like me."

"By the way," I said changing the subject, "I read your book. It's great. Just like your daily columns."

"As a matter of fact they are my daily columns. The editor thought it would be a good idea to put them all together."

"It's fantastic," I said. "You never get tired reading them. Particularly that bit about cricket. You know when Pearson Surita says to..."

Bolshoi gave a low moan.

"What's the matter with him?" I asked. "Is he sick?"

"Oh nothing, it's just that he gets a bit jealous when people start discussing my book. He feels there is not enough of him in the book."

"Are you anti-Russian Mr Busybee?"

"Not at all. My best friend is named after a famous ballet company in Russia. It's not so much that I'm anti-Russian as that I'm not pro-American. Let me put it this way. I'm pro-Love Story and pro-the Common man. I'm pro-little boys who play marbles, and pro-going to the Circus which makes me feel young again, I'm pro-tea shops which have seen better days and..."

"You're beginning to sound like Julie Andrews singing about her favourite things," said Bolshoi interrupting. "Don't tell me you're going all soft again. I thought you were supposed to be writing a column to make people laugh."

Busybee looked thoughtful.

"Bolshoi is a clever dog," he said, "but sometimes he doesn't understand everything. Like he doesn't know what it means to be a human being."

"Like he doesn't know what it means never to be elected Man of the Year."

"Like he doesn't know what it means to grow old and know that you'll never be young again."

"Well if you've finished repeating yourself I think we'd better go," said Bolshoi getting up with a decisive shake. "If she thinks you're so smart why doesn't she just read your book again."

"Hey wait," I cried. "There's one more thing I wanted to ask you Mr Busybee. Did you really cry when you saw *Love Story*?"

But there was no answer. Even as they walked down the street, the man and the dog had vanished into thin air.

And it had started raining again.



Wadia (Continued from page 17)

I think we've missed the bus on this housing business. Costs are going up enormously; I think it is a great mistake we didn't build before, even if there were certain risks involved. I think we should have accepted those risks. The major need was housing for the community. The objective should not be set aside for the sake of some technical details.

Parsiana: Is that what has happened?

Wadia: Well a lot of that was there. For instance, the assessment—we were afraid in Cusrow Baug of the assessment being increased and affecting the whole place. Well I'm not a lawyer and I suppose it's correct. It might have been done but I still felt we should have taken the risk.

Parsiana: Do you feel there are any other fields in which the Panchayat is lacking?

Wadia: Well yes, in many things. I think perhaps there should be a revision of the election of the Panchayat. It would be a good thing if more of the community were allowed to vote. This whole system could be reorganized. It was fine when it was a small community, when there were a few major families who were the leaders. But I understand those sort of people who contributed originally are now fast fading out. Obviously when one system is being eliminated by the course of time a new, more appropriate system, to meet modern conditions, should be evolved. I think nowadays every Parsi is educated—before, when these original forms of elections were in existence only 50 per cent were, maybe more, maybe less.

Parsiana: Are you still connected with the different Wadia charities?

Wadia: Well we have this committee of the two trusts, the R.N. and the N.M. Wadia Trusts for housing. The board of management consists of two of the Panchayat and two of us. And we meet at fairly regular intervals. We do the actual office work here in this building.

Parsiana: And what is the main objective of the charities?

Wadia: Well when we started the Ness Wadia Foundation the

Genetically speaking you've got to be a strong race. You can't help that in order to survive. Otherwise you get absorbed and forgotten and lost.



idea was that instead of each company being called upon to give some money to this, that and the other, we would coordinate it and at the same time each year, we would contribute to the Ness Wadia Foundation the amount the government allowed us to contribute free of tax, as there is a ceiling on the percentage of the profit you can give away in charity. So we channelled them through the Ness Wadia foundation. We helped to build up some funds and kept some aside, naturally, for disasters and things like that. Between the fund and Bombay Dyeing we've done a lot of relief work.

Parsiana: These funds are non-communal?

Wadia: Yes. We have our two hospitals. Those are completely non-communal.

Parsiana: For which activities is the money from the Wadia Trusts utilized for Parsis?

Wadia: Well these two main trusts are only for housing.

Parsiana: Are you planning any more housing now?

Wadia: Oh yes, we've got plenty of plans but the costs are going up enormously. How do we finance the cost of a flat today? It's very expensive—a person can get a flat of eight hundred square feet which is worth eighty thousand rupees; can he afford the rent?

Parsiana: What do you see as the solution to this problem?

Wadia: Well, it's not insoluble.

We must solve it. There are a lot of properties which could in some cases be usefully sold and the money, which is very substantial, be ploughed back into building houses.

Parsiana: Are you getting co-operation from other trusts to build?

Wadia: Unfortunately or fortunately, I don't know which, the two trusts, R.N. and N.M., were not permitted to receive monies from anywhere else. They are completely isolated trusts.

Parsiana: People are pessimistic about trusts coming together and selling property and amalgamating.

Wadia: I think there's too much holding-the-fort mentality at the moment. Not enough coming out and getting into battle and attacking the problems which are facing the community. We want more drive and energy in attacking these problems.

Parsiana: Do you feel that Parsis should stay in India or go abroad?

Wadia: I don't think that there's anything wrong in either travelling abroad or staying here. The headquarters of the Parsi community are still bound to be in Bombay whatever happens. They always have been.

Parsiana: Do you feel economic conditions in India are as conducive as abroad?

Wadia: No, I don't think they are as conducive, nor do I think

they can be because of the sheer weightage of the population in the country. Just think of walking along a street forty years ago in Bombay and walking along a street today. Now you just get pushed off the pavement while in those days you had it to yourself. The huge increase in population has caused shortages. When I first came to Bombay in 1931, of course the whole subcontinent was one country, we used to export two million tonnes of wheat a year out of Karachi alone. India was once an exporter of food and today we have to import it in millions and millions of tonnes.

Parsiana: Do you feel circumstances are such today that if you could expand Bombay Dyeing, you would? Or would you leave it as it is?

Wadia: Well I feel we should diversify if we want to keep our position. We would like to keep as modern as we possibly can. We lead in that field and I think we've managed all right. We should continue doing it.

Parsiana: What advice would you give to a young Parsi who

wants to know what field he should go into, what vocation, business or job he should take up?

Wadia: It all depends on what his bent is. The first thing I'd say would be, 'What do you want to do? Is it a practical idea?' and work from there onwards. If he likes to play the piano, yes, fine, let him make a career out of playing the piano. Nothing wrong in it. I find many people in the community who have very definite ideas about what they like, what they want to do and what their bent is. It's almost a compulsion, there's a sort of compelling force inside them which gives them the urge to do these sort of things. They're very individualistic. You'll find Parsis doing all sorts of things. Its quite extraordinary. And I think one of the great virtues of the community is that there are individuals, they do like to do things independently and they are quite clear in making up their minds about the life they want to lead or the profession they want to follow. It's quite unique when you think of the number of doctors, surgeons and professional

people, even in government and business and so forth. We have a very good spread of interests. I think one of the things which has given the community this advantage over some of the other communities is that when you get married you go out and live on your own. Fending for themselves is the best thing in the world for making people think for themselves and I should guess not many of the other communities dare move without going to the head of the clan or family and saying, 'what shall I do about this?' They lose their initiative. I think this is one of the features the Parsi community has retained—a sense of initiative. As soon as you get married—out, off you go on your own. Everybody's very happy to see them with grandchildren and everything, but they are on their own. I think this is very healthy.

Parsiana: Is this what happened in your case?

Wadia: Oh yes, definitely. When I came back on October 15, 1931 the boat docked at seven o'clock in the morning, I went home, had a bath, shaved, went down to break-

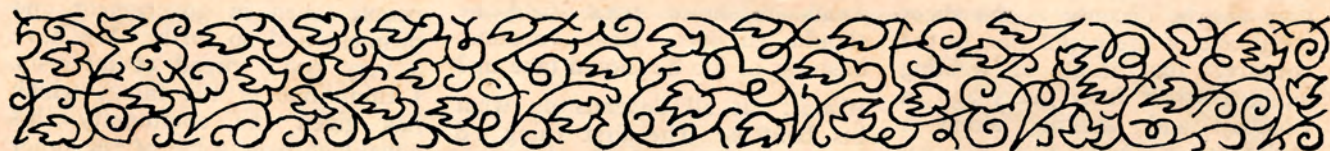
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fast and the car came to the door and I asked my father where he was going. So he says 'It's not for me, it's for you.' So I said 'where am I going?' And he said, 'You're going down to the mill,' and by nine-thirty I was at the mill. That's how I started work. Same morning. That was a very good thing and I did the same to my son too. I made him go down to the mill. He didn't like it then but now he blesses me for it. He's very happy that I did.

Parsiana: When you graduated from college were you keen on going into the mills or did you have some other vocation in mind?

Wadia: No, I had the full intention of going into the mills. Funnily enough I didn't have any conception of what life would be like here and I went to my father and I said I'd like to come back to Bombay and I'd like to go to work. So he said, 'Right-o come on,' and he brought me back.

Parsiana: How much time do you spend in India now?

Wadia: I'm now restricting myself to a total of three hundred and sixty-five days in four years.

Parsiana: When you are abroad are you still active in the business?

Wadia: Oh yes! The telephone rings from Bombay, the cables come, a pile of mail arrives practically every day, nearly every-



I think they should have a little younger blood in the Parsi Panchayat... it would be a good thing if more of the Community were allowed to vote.

body in this office writes to me individually, each company corresponds with me.

Parsiana: What is your age now?
Wadia: I should be sixty-three in August.

Parsiana: Do you plan to retire any time?

Wadia: Well I've been trying to for some time, but not very successfully.

Parsiana: What would you do if you retired?

Wadia: Oh when I'm at home in Switzerland I'm very busy. I thought I was going to play lots of golf, read books and do all the things I haven't been able to do

upto now because I've been too busy. Quite the contrary, I find I'm busier than ever and I have so many things to do. I love to fiddle around in the garden, play with the dogs—there are so many things to do, so many friends... its very pleasant.

Parsiana: You would not miss your work?

Wadia: Well, yes, of course, one misses the activity, but life is changing. I think you must learn to slow down and let other people get on with it. After all none of us is immortal. We've got to recognize that. We've got to leave something behind which will go on.

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Bengalee (Continued from page 28)

Bengalee served on many committees with very diverse objects. He was one of three Parsis on a committee appointed to establish a branch of the St. John's Ambulance Association in Bombay; he sat on a committee appointed to look into the Factory Act and submit recommendations to the Government; and he was on a Commission appointed by the Government to look into the Abkari Laws and the hardships encountered by wine merchants and toddy vendors. Four hearings were held; the memorandum submitted to the government contained over 8,000 signatures.

His fund-raising activities covered a wide variety of causes. He was a member of a committee formed under the patronage of Lady Reay to collect funds to assist Indian women to study medicine. He chaired a meeting which collected Rs. 12,000 towards establishing the Parsi Lying-in-Hospital, which later was moved to Outram Road.

He was also one of the first trustees of the Byramjee Jeejeebhoy Parsi Charitable Institute which provided educational fac-

ilities upto standard five for 400 boys. Under his chairmanship a meeting was convened to start a sanatorium at Nasik for women of all communities. Dr. Ms Peachy Phipps was given 11 acres of land, on which bungalows were erected two named in memory of Sorabjee Bengalee.

A rather different kind of meeting was convened one January day in 1884 at the residence of Jehangirjee Cawasjee Readymoney. Its purpose was to start a sophisticated, elite Parsi Club. Sir Phiroozshah Mehta declared that over 200 Parsis had enlisted their names as founder-members; this became the well-known Ripon Club.

By donating prizes, Bengalee encouraged sportsmen, especially Bombay's cricket-players. He was the spirit behind the Parsi Cricket Club.

Selections from his writings were published in two large volumes, taken from the many articles and papers he had written on almost all the important topics of the day. Unfortunately we could not trace them either in the Asiatic Library or in the Cama Oriental Institute.

When he passed away on April 3, 1893, prominent ladies of all communities held a meeting to raise funds to perpetuate his memory. The money collected was used for the sanatorium at Nasik for women and children of all communities. A close friend, Mangaldas Karsandas Mulji, published a book in his memory: *Ekko Ner Sorabjee Shapoorjee Bengalee—C.I.E. Charitra*. At a public meeting called by the Sheriff of Bombay a sum of Rs. 51,215 was collected. Twenty-two thousand rupees was set aside for a full-size marble statue, and the remainder was handed over to the Joint School Committee with a request to the Municipal Corporation to purchase a house at Karelwadi for The Charni Road Girls' School founded at his initiative and to be named in his memory.

His contributions to social progress were manifold, but he especially espoused the cause of women—their education and their health. He would have been gratified to see what an immeasurable change education has brought about in the status of women. Surely he would have approved of the principles, if not the paraphernalia, of women's lib.

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APPLY TO PRINCIPAL FOR ADMISSION

Letters (Continued from page 10)

who will give them full support. There are many people who shout slogans against religion and they are very dangerous people. But for months together they keep repeating the same old thing.

I am not a reformist or an orthodox. I am the follower of the middle path set by our forefathers. And this golden path will work wonders in bringing peace and unity to the community together. Unity is today's vital question. Before attempting to solve religious questions we must establish peace and unity in the community; only after that can the other questions be solved. If unity does not prevail, the community cannot work together politically, economically and religiously and will never rise. This cannot be achieved if only a few get together.

I felt very sad to note that persons who had no success by writing in our local papers had to go and write the article in Time.

S. M. D. NAHALLADAROO

Trustee (Continued from page 11)

with the 189 members of the donors' 'F' Register (those who donated over Rs. 5,000 to the Panchayat), vote the trustee to office. Ms Noble claimed in a letter to the *Jam-e-Jamshed* that several people were approached to seek the trusteeship but they turned it down. Nanabhoy Jeejeebhoy said he was not interested at present; Justice Jal Vimadlal turned it down as he felt there would be a conflict of interest with his judicial duties; Mr. Manekji B. Hodiwalla of Simplex Art Flooring refused on grounds of health and his present work load. Jamshed (Jimmy) Guzder, a prominent entrepreneur and Director of several companies, was proposed but turned down apparently because he is a friend and neighbour of Shiavax Vakil (the Independents are at logger-heads with Vakil over his disclosures concerning the dokhmas; see *Parsiana* October and November issues). Shortly thereafter a letter appeared in the *Jame* signed by eminent members of the community, in-

cluding Vimadlal and Jeejeebhoy, urging Ms Noble to seek the trusteeship. She then announced her candidacy.

At a function held at the Hotel President to felicitate her on the victory, one speaker likened her to Golda Meir and Eleanor Roosevelt. The orator no doubt was inclined to hyperbole, but in a community where women are treated as second-class citizens, are not permitted a majority on the Panchayat (the number of female trustees at any one time is limited to three), are barred from rearing their children as Parsis if they marry out, are forbidden from being ordained as priests and from entering places of worship during menstruation, Ms Noble's election is not without significance.

Silence (Continued from page 24)

journal. But this time it might be a monthly—and it must be in English. Because otherwise Ilme-Kshnum will remain a closed book, an esoteric philosophy which only the older generation knows about."

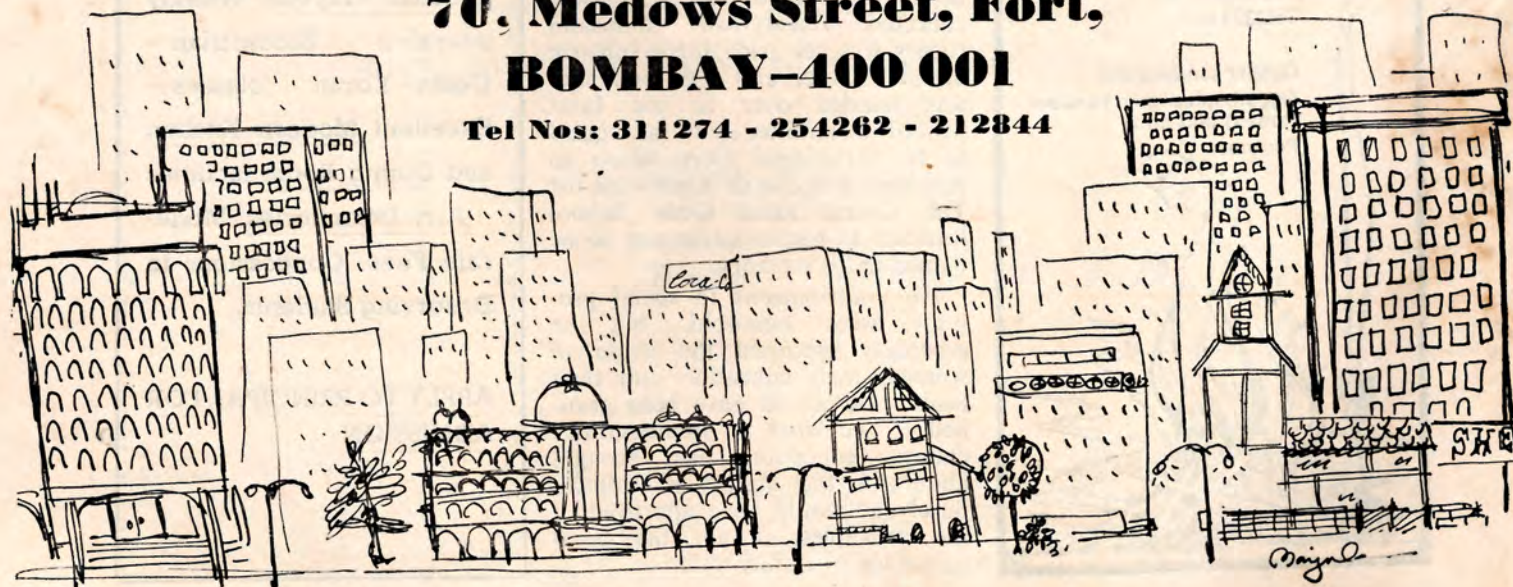
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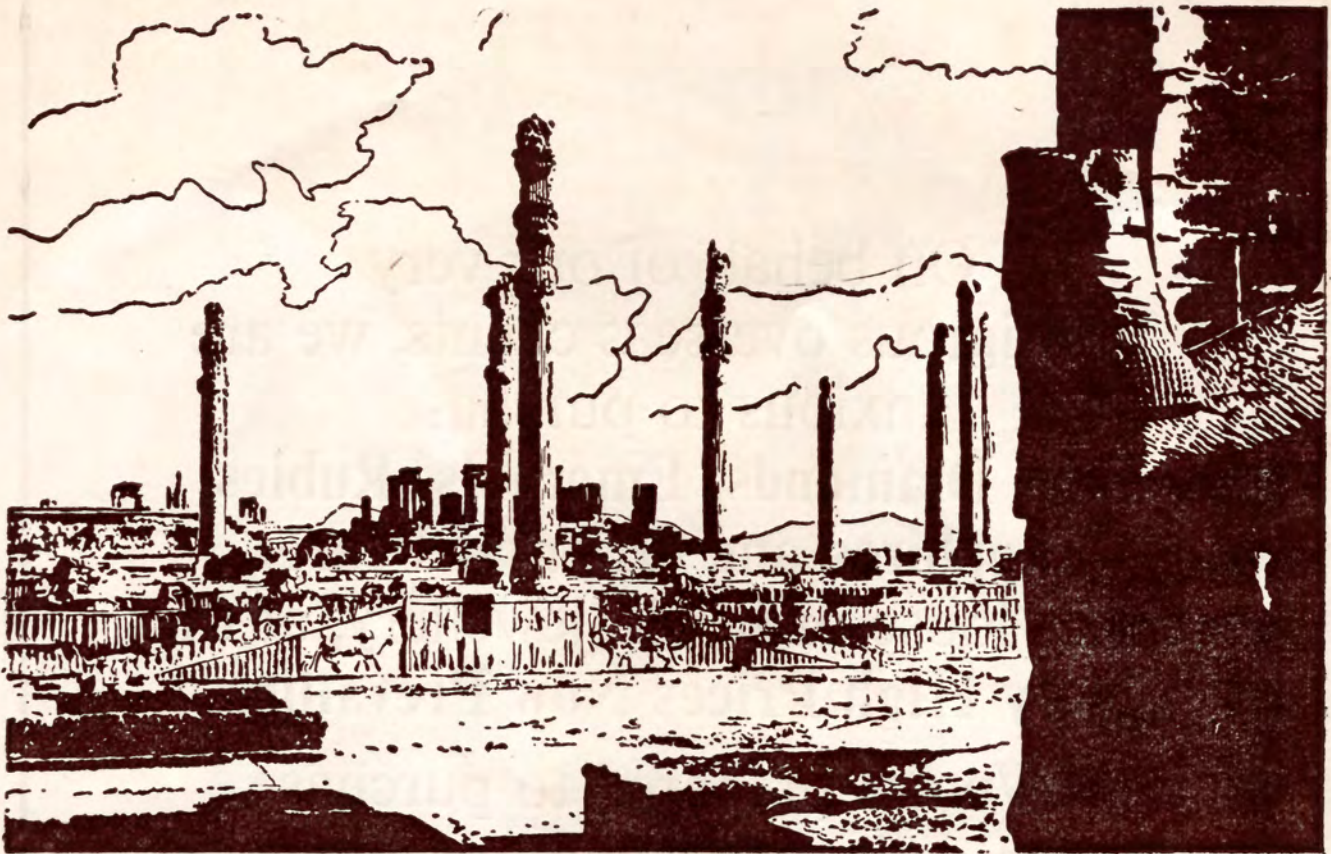


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