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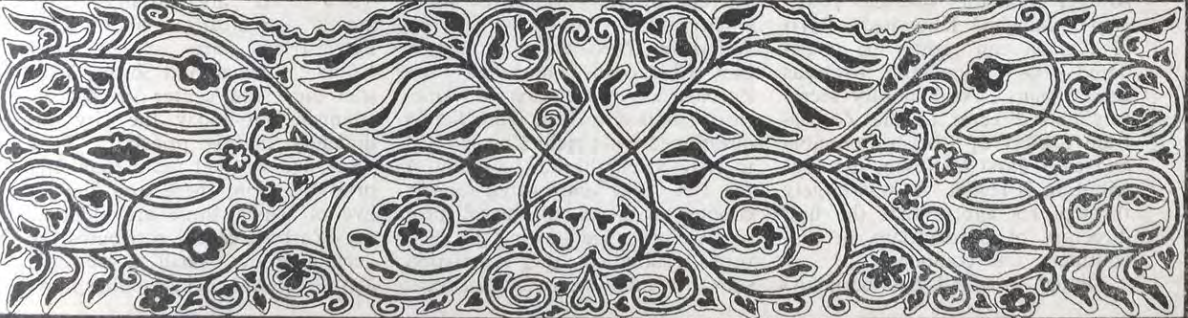
Parsiana

August-September 1974

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Parsiana Cover depicting stamps to symbolize the International Zoroastrian Community designed by Manjula Padmanabhan.



editor's column

Ever since men have built homes they have had an urge to leave them. In Parsis this trait can be traced back at least 1,300 years when due to reasons of health we fled Persia for India's hospitable shores. That globe-trotting instinct still lurks within and today Parsis are scattered all over the 360 degrees of this joyless world.

To keep track of them and their doings one would need the resources of the CIA, the network of Interpol and the facilities of a satellite. The next best bet is to rely on the post office—but then not everybody is a good correspondent. So finally information is gathered from those peripatetic souls, who having left for greener pastures, return for a navjote or a marriage or a funeral.

Thus this issue was long in the making as articles and interviews trickled in over the course of the year. But despite all our efforts, the end product is far from comprehensive. We have just scratched the surface. Information from some countries is still forthcoming and other matter we have in hand has to be held over due to limitations of space.

After India, the largest number of Zoroastrians reside in Iran, around 25,000. The next largest concentration, about 5,500 is in Pakistan, mostly around Karachi. There are approximately 2,000 Parsis in England and a similar number on the American continent. Africa has around 1,100. Australia and Hong Kong have about 150 each. All these figures are educated guesses made by people from the places concerned.

Judging from the response we received to our queries, the most active group of Zoroastrians Abroad is on the American continent. Jamshed Khurshedji Pavri of Canada can rightly be considered the doyen of overseas Zoroastrians. As honorary secretary and director of the Zoroastrian Society of British Columbia and as a Parsi historian, his contribution is legion. It was largely through his efforts that the first directory of Zoroastrians in that continent was compiled.

Though England has been the

bastion of overseas Parsis, all our requests for articles from there drew a blank. Having established themselves over the years, their attitude today seems to be one of 'don't rock the boat.' Their American counterparts, on the other hand believe in going full speed ahead. Dr. Jehan Bagli of Montreal, on a recent visit to Bombay sought direction from the local leadership but found none forthcoming. He now feels the Quebec Association should formulate policy in light of their western environment. Bagli, like many others also feels the label 'Parsi' is irrelevant in the overseas context. They consider themselves as citizens of their respective countries practising the



Ms Advani: 'The mother is closer'

Zoroastrian faith. Lovji Cama and Erach Munshi of the Greater New York Association are still in the process of building up their organization and creating an interest among local Zoroastrians in the association. In Chicago, a similar attempt by Keki Bhote misfired, when with a view to bringing all American Zoroastrians together, the Chicagoans launched the Zoroastrian Association of America. Parsis elsewhere immediately questioned what right Chicago had to claim itself the Parsi Capital of the U.S. The unexpected outcry, coupled with all the usual problems inherent in starting any venture, resulted in the association soon becoming an ineffectual local

body. Lack of financial resources and the absence of retired individuals who could spare time for the organizational leg work, has hampered the growth of associations in America.

One question faced by all overseas Zoroastrians and avoided by most, is that of inter-marriage. Children brought up in a foreign land cannot be expected to always marry within the community. For males who marry out at least their children are considered Parsis but for the women it is not so. Rather than formulate any regulations, most associations have left matters to the individuals concerned. Thus Ms Dolly (Kotwal) Advani of Minneapolis was planning to have the Navjote ceremony of her two children performed as they came of age. Her husband, Indru, favours the idea as he feels, "he is not in a position to impart religious instruction to the children. He feels the mother is closer to the children." Says Ms Advani. "We basically believe there is one God so it doesn't make a difference which way you approach him." Unless reforms are introduced, Parsis will be headed for the history books, warns Keki Bhote.

In Iran too reforms are being adopted. Conversion is permitted and the towers of silence have long given way to burial grounds. "There is nothing mentioned in our religion favouring *dokhma* or burial," says Merwan J. Zartoshty, a prominent member of the Zoroastrian community and who along with his brother, Faridoon, is one of the leading manufacturers in Iran. "The dead must be disposed in the best possible way available at the time."

Around 20,000 Zoroastrians live in the Teheran area, most of them in business with a few in government service, notes Zartoshty; in Yazd there are around 3,500, mostly agriculturists; about 1,500 Zoroastrians are spread over Isfahan, Karman and Shiraz. Yazd was once the center of Zoroastrianism but today the city has difficulty finding priests. "Fifty years ago we had more than fifty priests. Now there are four or five of which three are elderly," says Zartoshty. He attributes the decline to the "small income and loss of interest. The families mov-

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ed to Teheran. The children became doctors, engineers, architects, philosophers—but not mobeds. We are trying to get help from India. We have received some applications and are planning to take some of them to Teheran and Yazd. They will have to look after the *atash behram*, perform religious ceremonies and explain the religion." As Dinshaw Behram Irani, vice president of the Iranian Zoroastrian Anjuman in India noted following a recent trip to Iran, "the exodus of Zoroastrians from Yazd has resulted in the properties of our ancestors, so covetted for the last 1,300 years, being either sold or left behind unattended."

In Africa the number of Parsis has dwindled to around 1,100, notes Jamshed D. Byramjee of Nairobi, a trustee of the Nairobi Parsi Zoroastrian Anjuman and a prominent entrepreneur. After independence those who had not opted for African citizenship had to gradually leave. "The countries would like to give preference to their own people," said

Byramjee, who is a Kenyan citizen. Those who have stayed on are well settled and happy, he notes. There is only one fire temple in Africa. It is located in Zanzibar. There is no tower of silence in Africa, nor is there any move to have one, says Byramjee. "There will not be enough corpses for the birds; the community is so small. During all my life, the maximum number of deaths I have known of in a year, is five. Everywhere we have a burial ground." Religious instruction is given to children by Sohrab Rabadi, a teacher by profession. Anjuman members help out with the religious services. Byramjee says he himself has officiated at several ceremonies. Despite the small numbers, Byramjee notes the Parsis in Africa "would like to remain as a separate entity. The educated Africans don't mind. The Sikhs celebrate Guru Nanak day and many people are invited for the function. Freedom of religion for all citizens has been imbued in the constitution."

In Nepal there are a few Parsis, one of whom Neville Wadia spoke

about in his Cusrow Baug address on Jamshedi Navroz: "Perhaps many of you may not know Mr Jimmy Contractor or the saga of his life. He was the owner of five distilleries in Western India until the day prohibition closed them down completely. With what remained he went to Assam and built a plywood factory and a sawmill. One night they were destroyed in an earthquake. He rebuilt them, and two years later his factories and all he had were washed away in a flood. That would be enough to break any man's heart—but not Jimmy's. He went to his friend, Mr. Nari Rustomji, who was then the Dewan of Sikkim. Rustomji helped him obtain a licence to build a distillery at Rangpo. After that was successful, he built two more distilleries, one in Nepal and the other in Bhutan."

A lifetime in journalism can turn anyone into a cynic. But occasionally even in our clouded lives a ray of light penetrates and we feel the financial bankruptcy, loss of health and unqualified unhappiness are partly worth the oc-

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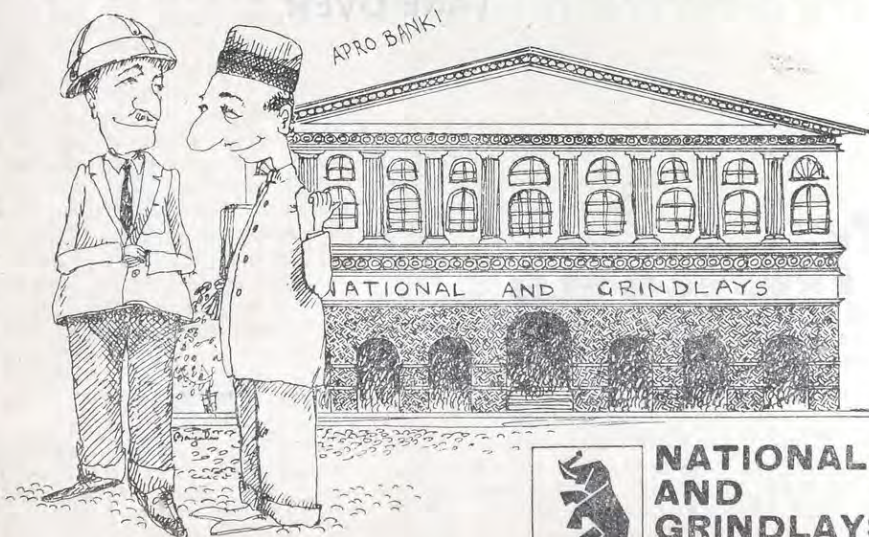
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cupational hazards. Thus it was after reading Neville Wadia's interview in our last issue where he stressed the need for reforms in the Parsi Panchayat election system, that seven office-going Parsis, Dinshaw K. Tomboly, Purvez J. Dholoo, Kekobad S. Batliwala, Jal F. Langrana, Piroze M. Khan, Murzban J. Billimoria and Dara S. Mahuvawalla decided electoral reforms had to be introduced. So they put several advertisements in the Parsi press requesting like-minded Parsis to write in. They received over 300 replies from people of all ages and walks of life. "An 80 year old invalid with failing sight wrote in to say he couldn't help with the leg work but he would contribute to the expenses," said Tomboly. While the response from the educated strata was encouraging, the seven noted the response from the Parsi colonies was extremely poor. As yet the crusaders are novices in the field of Parsi politicking, but their initial enthusiasm more than makes up for the lack of an immediate plan of action. No doubt as they become more knowledgeable, as they organize and attend meetings, answer the incessant queries and grow deaf from all the shouting, they will realize what a Herculean task they have undertaken and they may well wonder why they forsook the tranquility of private life for the hurly burly of Parsi politics. But it is for the rest of us to whip them on and keep their interest alive. So write in to any of them care of *Parsiana* offering your services.

The controversy over the Towers of Silence is heating up again. But this time the attack on the time honoured institution will no longer be from what Nadir Mulla, former chairman of the Parsi Panchayat, once dismissed as the "microscopic minority." As people gradually move into the Grand Paradi Apartments and other high rise buildings that are fast surrounding and over shadowing the Doongerwadi estate they are going to be concerned by the proximity of the towers. As long as the dokhmas were distant and not visible to the eye, the controversy was limited to the commu-

nity. Others viewed it with indifference, awe or curiosity. They cannot be expected to do the same when every morning on awakening, one of the first sights to greet them will be that of a corpse being devoured. Already a debate is being carried out in the reader's columns of *The Indian Express* and it won't be long before the subject is taken up by the other media. Reports are circulating that a colour film of a corpse being carried into a tower has been shot by an American television crew.

While the trustees of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat have adopted an ostrich-like stance on the problem, Anjumans in other parts of India have at least been polling their constituents on the disposal of the dead. The Calcutta Parsi



Zartoshty: A need for priests

Zoroastrian Association in its annual report for 1973 noted in reply to their two questions: "Do you agree that in order to preserve peace and harmony in the community, it is essential to give freedom of choice to every individual or family to decide the method of disposal? And secondly do you object to the use of Ravangah and extension of normal facilities to the families who prefer a method other than *dokhmanashini*?" found that "a very large percentage of the community was in favour of giving freedom of choice in the exercise of selection of the method of disposal.

"Likewise, on the second question, 86% of those who answered did not object to the facility of Ravangah being given to those who preferred any method other than *dokhmanashini*.

"It was a very healthy and happy

sign to find in Parsi families of Calcutta a complete lack of any excitement on the difference of views on these matters. Many families cheerfully declared that they were indifferent—let there be any method decided upon by the community and they would agree to follow it. The extreme cases were very rare."

In the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad, the attitude of the Anjuman to their poll results was less sanguine. In a short cryptic note the Anjuman members were informed that "the Committee having called for an opinion poll from the Community of the Twin Cities who are members of the Anjuman on the subject of disposal of the dead and allied matters and having found that hardly 15 per cent have responded and even of the 15 per cent, over 50 per cent are not in favour of going against the age old tradition of the disposal of the dead, have decided not to take any further steps and to close the subject once and for all." What the Anjuman note failed to point out was that though 175 felt *dokhmanashini* was the best method for disposal and 129 favoured burial and cremation, 58 per cent were in favour of the Anjuman providing a separate burial ground, 69 per cent were in favour of the priests performing the ceremonies for those who opted for burial or cremation and 60 per cent were "in favour of the dead being shown to other communities after *sachkar* and completion of *Gehsarni*." Clearly this was a vote for reform. By ignoring it the Anjuman has done a great disservice to its members.

From Poona comes the gruesome report of forty-five vultures dying on consuming the body of a suicide by poison case. The Poona pall bearers were said to have refused to clean up the *dokhma* and finally an appeal was made to the Bombay Parsi Panchayat which dispatched personnel from Doongerwadi to do the needful.

An editorial in the latest issue of *Dipanjali*, the half yearly journal of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman states, "There is no doubt that a suitable alternative to the *dokhmas* has to be found soon, preferably by consensus, and the Bombay Parsi Panchayat as a body whom

the community look upon as leaders, should take greater initiative in the matter. Those who wish to perpetrate the existing practice rely, somewhat illogically on religious sanction and ancient custom. There can be no doubt whatever that the *dokhma* has no religious basis as such. The argument of ancient tradition is somewhat anachronistic in the present times and conditions. What is more unreasonable is the ban placed on the priests performing ceremonies for those wishing alternative methods of disposal. It is difficult to understand the logic of a priest being allowed to perform the required rites in the case of a burial, say in Delhi, and not being permitted to do the same in Bombay simply on the ground that a *dokhma* exists there. Although it is an axiom of our faith that all rituals and ceremonies must necessarily be performed by priests, cannot a man hope to get to heaven if a few sincere prayers are recited by his relatives and friends at his cremation or burial? Death like religion is a personal matter. One should feel

free to choose the method of disposal of his body in the sure and satisfying knowledge that the required prayers and rituals will be performed.

"Here in Delhi the customary method of disposal is burial though why the more sensible method of cremation has been discouraged is difficult to understand. On the subject of cremation the Board of Trustees of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman had some years ago obtained the written opinion of Dastur Hormazdaya Mirza. The learned Dastur expressed his personal opinion against cremation which the Board of Trustees adopted as an official ruling. That the disposal of a dead body by burning does not defile the fire has been convincingly argued by many learned Parsis. In any case, electric crematoriums now exist in all major towns and one does not require a fire at all for the purpose. The fact that the Calcutta Parsi Anjuman were at one time examining the possibility of establishing a crematorium should convince us that cremation is not prohibited by the Zoroastrian reli-

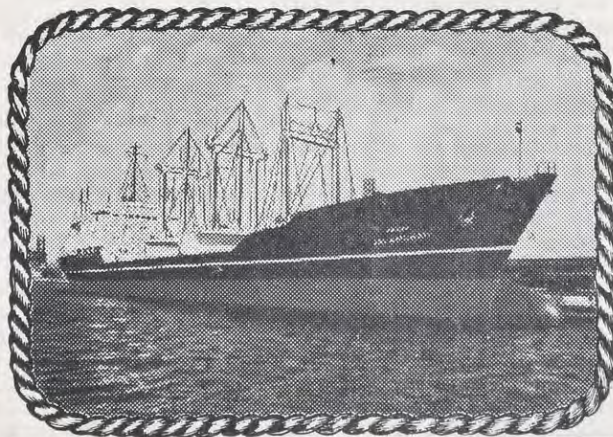
gion. In these circumstances, the Trustees of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman would do well to take a second look at their ruling."

The Nehru Museum and Library in New Delhi is on the lookout for portraits and paintings of great Parsi leaders. Mr. Ramesh Sanzgiri, the Art Director for *The Times of India* has written to us requesting help in locating the same and noting *The Times* has "decided to make a complete inventory and photographic record of such pictures and portraits in the collection of various organizations and well-known families in Bombay." People or institutions having such paintings are requested to write in to Mr. Sanzgiri or *Parsiana*.

Those who appreciated the 1974 *Parsiana* calendar will be disappointed to know we can't perform an encore for 1975. We are still very much in the red and all our resources are pooled in to keep the magazine going. We lost over Rs. 2,000 on our last calendar and this year with all the rise in prices it is just beyond our means. Our apologies.

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Neville Wadia

It was a pleasure to read your interview with Neville Wadia. It was one of the best I have ever read. The questions put by you were both pertinent and probing, and the replies given by Wadia, thought-provoking and scholarly.

That Wadia entertains very strong feelings for the Parsi community is a known fact. But very few Parsis know that he has similar feelings for the Zoroastrian religion also, despite the fact that he is a Protestant Christian belonging to the Church of England.

I would like to cite just one instance of which I was a witness, to show the extent of his feelings for Zoroaster. In the first week of April 1971 Wadia was presiding over the Annual General Meeting of Bombay Dyeing at Patkar Hall, and as was his usual practice he called upon the shareholders to question him about the working of the Company. Taking his turn at the microphone, one shareholder disapproved of the practice of keeping the offices of the Company closed on Jamshedi Nowroz, though it had ceased to be a public holiday, and further questioned the propriety of the Company spending annually some Rs. 500 for notices in various daily papers to that effect. Wadia ignored the first part of the question, but informed the shareholder that notices were published to avoid inconveniences to the public. At this moment something happened that should gladden the hearts of all Parsis. The

shareholder had referred to Jamshedi Nowroz only, and everybody appeared to be satisfied with Wadia's reply. However, Wadia as he stood before the microphone appeared disturbed. Turning to his son, Nusli, he asked in a subdued voice full of concern, "But what about Khordad Sal?" It was only when Nusli informed him that Bombay Dyeing remains closed on Khordad Sal also that Wadia appeared satisfied and proceeded with the work at hand.

Neville Wadia, through his good thoughts, words and deeds has won the hearts of all Parsis. But what about the future generations of Wadias? It is for us to see to it that Nusli Wadia does not drift away from the Parsi community. We must impress upon various Parsi organizations—Cusrow Baug Welfare League, Rustom Baug Association, Navroz Baug Play Centre, Petit Parsi General Hospital—the importance of associating him with their organizations, by inviting him to preside over their functions. The Wadia family means a lot to our community and we simply cannot afford to lose it.

DARA J. CONTRACTOR

In the strain and strife of daily life when we Parsis delight in running down one another—it was a pleasure to read Neville Wadia's thought provoking, constructive and hopeful interview.

He says he is a Christian following the Church of England—but I am convinced he is in his heart of hearts a Parsi—"a pucca Parsi."

A Parsi who sympathetically feels for his small community. A Parsi who has benevolent ideas for the good of the small community. A Parsi who wishes this small community to prosper and live forever. God bless him.

DINSHAW B. IRANI

Pugree vs. Fetah

I have read with interest your interview with various persons in your last issue on "Do you prefer the Pugree or Fetah" and also "The Twilight of the Pugrees." I think you should have interviewed those

who habitually wear this headgear. Anyhow, both are out of fashion now, especially the pugree. If the persons who know the art are no more interested in making them, who will wear a pugree in the future? Besides don't you think it is a peculiar thing to wear the same? It is not at all an Iranian headgear. When I last visited Iran I saw Zoroastrian priests wearing a turban akin to those shown in the picture on page 13 of *Parsiana* titled 'A Parsi School'. Similar pugrees are worn by mobeds in *Dadiseth Agiary*. The Muslim priests in Iran, wear a similar turban but black in colour, while Zoroastrians have to use a white turban. Can any religious scholar throw some light on what was the headgear in Iran of Zoroastrians centuries back? To my humble belief, the present Parsee Pugree is an inverted hoof of the cow which the community venerated once upon a time. But I still think the pugree is a replica of that worn by Kopal Banias when we first landed at Div. They wore similar pugrees and several photographs are there in temples for one to verify. The shape and size is the same, and our forefathers used to wear it made of "tanchoi" cloth and not the black shiny one which is used at present. This could also have been borrowed, as with many of our customs, from our Hindu

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friends. Hindu rulers of Gujerat and Katiawar, a century or two back, used to wear pugrees and ours could be a modification of the same.

Our fetah, worn by many, looks like an inverted "*tapeli*" (vessel) with felt and strap over it to make it look more dignified. It is good for those who religiously wear it habitually, but for others it is more ornamental, something to be worn at Navjots or marriages, to be carried in the hands or left on a chair. It is only worn all the time at a funeral or fire temple, and it is not at all convenient after an hour or two on the head.

Can we not devise some better and more comfortable headgear?

S. R. WADIA

(Suggestions are welcome—Ed.)

Doongerwadi Resolution

I was extremely delighted to read in *Parsiana*, news of the repealing of the infamous Doongerwadi resolution which had required Parsis to sign a statement to the effect that non-Parsis will be banned from attending funeral prayers or viewing the dead after ceremonies. The rescinding of the act is not to be regarded merely as a vote of four to two, but as a resounding victory for all those who put first the brotherhood of mankind. Those who withdraw into their petty shells of orthodoxy and are fighting to maintain an outdated status quo, should have the interests of the community at heart, not try to control its religion.

The next step to be fought for, in my opinion, is the elimination of double standards so that Parsi girls who marry outside can bring up their children in their faith if so desired.

It was equally delightful to read about 'Busybee' in your Pateti issue. Why hasn't someone thought of putting him into the Parsi Panchayat to enliven the murderous atmosphere there?

KASHMIRA B. BARIA

Outdated

I was distressed to read Mr. Warden's *Panchayat Elections*. Something drastic must be done—if we

are to survive. I quite agree with him that it is only through the pages of your paper, can you start an unbiased campaign.

Some of our stupid, and orthodox customs must go, such as, that Parsi girls married outside the religion cannot have their children's *navjotes* performed. And Parsi girls married outside the religion are barred from entering our *atash behrams* and *agiaris* even though they have not changed their religion. I knew of an incident, when the child of a Parsi father who had married a non-Parsi, was debarred from entering an *agiar*. And if men and women who have married Parsis wish to become Zoroastrians they should be allowed to become Zoroastrians since, after all, our prophet himself converted followers otherwise we would not have our religion today. Unfortunately one is apt to get a bit heated over this—that is why I have noticed, that you have kept a perfect balance with the correct sense of humour in your paper.

BHICOO MANEKSHAW

Switch to the Towers

The cost of timber etcetera for burning the dead has become costly. I was wracking my brain as to how to reduce the cost of disposing dead bodies. A copy of your *Parsiana* was found in a library. On going through I found a controversy raging among Parsis as to the disposal of their dead.

I must admit, your method of disposal by the vultures is practically at no cost except what is incurred in keeping the Towers of Silence clean. Thus I feel this is a solution for the disposal of the

dead for Hindus as it will reduce the cost of timber to nil. I strongly recommend your method of disposal by vultures to my fellow Hindus, as the poor down-trodden can, with great relief to their pocket, keep the surroundings clean and healthy without flesh-burning smoke polluting the surrounding areas.

A crematorium is out of the question as the cost of power is rising, fuses deliberately go off, half-burnt bodies are thrown in rivers or the sea to be swallowed by the vultures of the waters viz. crocodiles etcetera. Bribing is common practice to get the disposal in the crematoriums done before the others. The crematoriums must cope up with epidemics producing 100 corpses at a time. Also the cost of upkeep of a crematorium is high due to the wages of the technical staff. Tons of timber will be saved all over India every day if we adopt your method.

K. B. SHAH
Nagpur

Charitable Myth

People give a misleading picture of the causes for the downfall of the Zoroastrian religion by saying that the price of sandalwood is Rs 70 per kilo, a 20 yard piece of mull cloth for *sudreh*s costs Rs 80 and a *kusti* costs Rs 30 and that the performance of religious ceremonies is, therefore, difficult. A *sudreh* serves the purpose of a cotton vest and after the ceremony it is worn by the person throughout the day. Thus the cost of a vest is saved. It is not necessary that the *sudreh* be stitched of mull cloth. It may be of standard cloth

Sir W. Arthur Lewis



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costing Rs 1.75 per metre. Twenty yards of cloth will produce 15 *sudreh*s and will last for two years. The cost of cotton vests will be the same as 20 yards of mull cloth, if not more. The cost of *sudreh*s is, therefore, not prohibitive.

The *kusti* should be thick and a bit longer than the required size. A *kusti* lasts for two years. Thus the cost of a *kusti* is Rs 1.25 per month—that is four paise per day. We can start *kusti* banks where *kustis* with broken ends may be collected by donation. These *kustis* can then be mended by shortening the lengths with new ends, making them suitable for children. There are many religious societies, such as The Raadi Society, The Vegetarian Society, and The Rahanumae Mandal, which can have their own *kusti* bank for distribution among the certified poor.

It is believed that people are born in certain religious sects due to the order of God and not by chance and that people should remain in the fold by making some sacrifice, for instance, setting aside four paise per day for a *kusti*. Besides, out of these four paise per day, two paise goes to the *mobed* family which does the knit-

ting of the *kustis*. Thus two paise per day go for charity among Parsis and the other two paise per day is the cost of wool which, unfortunately, goes to the open market.

It is to be remembered that Christians in general pay Rs 1.50 per month per family as a minimum subscription for the Church and priests. Well-to-do families give more per month and more is collected at the church itself. As for sandalwood, it is not compulsory to use it. It is to be noted that in general poor Parsis go to the fire temples only once or twice a year and offer a 25 paise stick of sandalwood and five paise for the upkeep of the fire temple, which also is not compulsory. I am sorry to explode the myth of the 'large hearted Parsi' and 'Parsi, thy name is charity.'

K. D. CHARGEMAN

Young Entrepreneurs

I have been going through *Parsiana* with keen interest, specifically since it discusses burning topics about the amelioration of our community whose numbers are fast dwindling.

I have noticed that the Editor's Column and the questions you ask the cross-section of our community on various topics are very laudable. However, in one of your next issues I would suggest you take up the cause of young entrepreneurs and the difficulties they face specifically without any collateral or financial backing from various financial institutions.

This is something which needs immediate attention as I feel that there is enough talent and entrepreneurial ability within our community, especially going back to a couple of decades. The foresight and the pioneering spirit which our forefathers manifested by venturing to distant places to set up businesses and factories helped the community grow.

I would request you to invite suggestions and guidance from the learned industrialists of our community which you have portrayed rather wittily in your June-July issue, because if the vital guidance that is needed is not given and immediately, the progress of the community dwindling would be much faster in view of the difficult economic situation which will get worse



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and is not going to help the community at all.

DADI E. MISTRY
New Delhi

According to me the basic cause of the steady decline of the achievements of our community is the weakening of the industrial activity controlled by our community. If we look back on the achievements of the stalwarts of our community of bygone days, such as Jamshedji Tata, Sir Jamshedji Jeejibhoy, Sir Behramjee Jeejibhoy, Sir Ness

Parsi World Records

The Guinness Book of World Records notes: "The longest non-repetitious piece for piano ever composed was the Opus Clavicembalisticum by Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji (born 1892). The composer himself gave it its only public performance on December 1, 1930, in Glasgow, Scotland. The work is in 12 movements with a theme and 49 variations and a Passacaglia with 81 and a playing time of 2½ hours."

And those of you who were shocked to learn in our August 1973 issue that Parsis had the highest divorce rate in the country—around 10 per cent—will be pleased to know that according to the book of records the "longest recorded marriage is one of 86 years between Sir Temulji Bhicaji Nariman and Lady Nariman from 1853 to 1940 resulting from a cousin marriage when both were five. Sir Temulji (born September 3, 1848) died, aged 91 years 11 months, in August, 1940."

Contributed by Dhun Mehta

Wadia, Phirozshah Godrej and the like, we would find that the prosperity of our community was largely due to strong and massive industrial activities which were being controlled by such stalwarts. The control of industrial and commercial activity by the leading Parsis naturally resulted in greater employment of Parsis, as well as in a higher income amongst the community, which in turn meant a greater purchasing power. Thus

the materialistic and economic needs of the community were in fact self-generated within the community, by larger percentages of employment and the better class of employment.

Today, unfortunately, the spirit of enterprise amongst the Parsis, is declining. The majority of Parsis would rather be in service than in business. The principal reasons for opting for service rather than for business are (1) There are less worries and tension in service than in business; and (2) fewer opportunities to raise the capital required for business.

Under the above circumstances, I feel that the trustees of the Parsi Panchayat should in fact devote their thinking and energies in establishing an industrial base. Unfortunately, however, our community, or at least certain sections of our community take great pride in projecting themselves as orthodox, or otherwise, instead of tackling the imminent problems by priorities. It is regretted that, the priorities are mixed up. I feel that the basic and immediate need of our community is to encourage the growth of industrial activity amongst its members, which would in the long run bring forth concrete results.

HECTOR H. MEHTA

The Parsi Prodigals

For business purposes, I have travelled around the world. In days gone by, Sindhis occupied the pride of place in business abroad. But after the war, adventurous Gujaratis and Punjabis have ventured to almost every nook and corner of the world. Members of the brave Patidar community today can be seen in every part of the world. After a Patidar settles down, he helps his relatives and friends to migrate. In the Panama Canal Zone, I was astonished to see a colony of some three thousand Patidars. Some Gujaratis have settled down in Argentina, Mexico, West Indies and have become prosperous. Why cannot Parsis emulate their example and make their fortunes?

Today, we are a community of clerks and typists. Every other Parsi youngster of today wants to work less and earn more and wants

(Continued on page 25)

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by Lovji Cama

(Lovji Cama is the honorary Secretary of the Greater New York Zoroastrian Association).

I came to the United States in 1960, after graduating from Bombay with a B.Sc. (Tech.) degree in Pharmaceutical Sciences, to do my M.S. at Columbia University in New York, with the help of a Tata Scholarship. Why was I motivated to come to the U.S.? Probably because I realized that I would learn more in my field if I got my Masters degree from the U.S. than if I continued further in India. It was also a sense of adventure that brought me here. I saw my friends going abroad and I felt that I would lose out in future competition if I did not get a degree from the U.S.

While I was doing my Masters at Columbia in Pharmacy, my thoughts about what I wanted to do in the future crystallized and I realized that if I was to do research in the discovery of new drugs, I would have to change my field to chemistry and get a Ph.D. Luckily I was able to get into the Ph.D. program in the Chemistry Department of Columbia University and in due time under an excellent teacher and researcher, Prof. Gilbert Stork, I got my degree in 1966. I worked two more years with him as a research fellow while getting my immigration status and then took my present job at Merck Sharp and Dohme Research Laboratories as a Senior Research Chemist.

The above is a brief history of my professional career in the U.S. I think I have been quite successful in my profession and I enjoy what I am doing. What made me choose to stay in the U.S.? I think I realized that I had over educated myself for the opportunities in India. I realized that it would be almost impossible for me to go to India and find the kind of work I was interested in and for which I had trained myself. What is more, a few friends of mine who returned to give India a chance, did not make it,



"It appears to me then that if our community does not survive into the second and third generation and further, it will not be because American society has hungrily absorbed us but because we will not have taken precautions against it."

wound up unhappy and eventually came back here.

Thus like many other Indian friends, I traded a successful and satisfying professional career for life among old friends, family and community. In this kind of trade-off one loses almost as much as one gains, unless one has moved away from home to run away from it. This was not the case for me personally and as far as I can tell is not the case for a large majority of Parsis and Indians here. If now one feels this way, is there anything one can do about it? How does one go about compensating for what one has lost in terms of old friends, family and community, when one has lost that sense of home? One answer is to form new friends (preferably American only) forget your family, community and religion and dissolve into the American way of life, adopting American values. For some this is the solution, but for most of us a solution such as this would be a total loss of identity.

As Parsis I think we are always very conscious of our identity and very proud of it; for many of us I think it is more important than we realize and some of us realize it only when we get out of India and especially Bombay.

Since I grew up outside Bombay before I went to college, I was always subconsciously aware of my sense of identity as a Parsi. Brought up in India I cannot

identify myself as an American (at least not yet) and having lived in the U.S. for so long I cannot return to India and call it a real home. Incidentally these feeling are common to all immigrants to the U.S. Being a Parsi, however, I have something that for me does not change with my location—it is my identity as a Parsi. This sense of being a Parsi does not come from being very religious, like a majority of Parsis back in India and here I think I am just pragmatic. I am not areligious, however, neither do I look for satisfaction in religions other than Zoroastrianism. The basic philosophy of our religion is to be good in thought, word and deed because it is the path of happiness and that happiness is the result of proper choice throughout one's life. This sense of being a Parsi, this identity, then stands as an anchor for me and for many of my Parsi friends in the United States. Most of my Parsi friends here have a very similar background to me. They came as students, did well, found well-paying interesting jobs which they could not give up and so took advantage of the relaxed immigration laws between 1966 and 1970 and stayed on as U.S. immigrants. A few have even become citizens.

The Parsi community around New York, which has grown from about 25 in 1960 to about 180 now, consists of highly educated, professional people (the immigration laws have seen to that). When I first came here there were perhaps 20-25 Parsis in the area mostly students and on Pateti and Jamshedi Navroze someone would invite friends and have a party at home. With time the 20-25 Parsis grew to between 50 to 60 and at that time, around 1966, a few of us decided to get together and rent a hall at the International House on Pateti and Jamshedi Navroze and cook Parsi food and invite every Parsi in the New York area to come to dinner. The cost of the dinner was taken care of by collecting a contribution, but no one made a profit. About 60 Parsis attended those first dinners, which became quite popular, because for many of us it was a rare chance to eat Parsi food and talk Parsi talk. With the relaxation of the immigration

laws the number of Parsis increased to about 180 adults in 1971 and the nature of our population changed from a mainly student population to families. The need for a Zoroastrian Association was now felt and in 1973 the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York was formed to try to solve some of the problems that we as a community face now and which we will face in the future.

The biggest problem as I can see arises from the mini scale size of our community which is scattered over a large area thereby making it difficult to come together often. Thus unlike Parsis in Bombay, or Parsis in smaller towns of India, where they live together in colonies or *mohalas*, we cannot reinforce our Parsiness, at least not easily. Our children here do not have a chance to grow up together, and go to the same schools as we did in India.

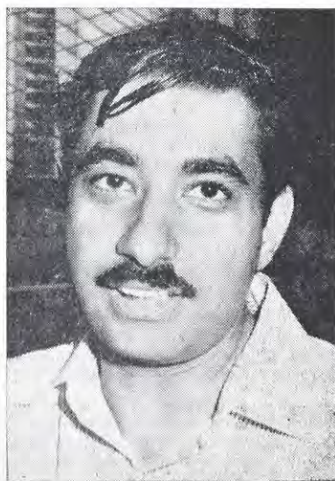
Also we are totally cut off from the ritualistic aspects of our religion. Not only do we not have an *agiary* or *atash-behram* to worship at but we do not even have a place of our own to meet and socialize. A *navjote* or a Parsi

wedding performed by *mobeds* is a rare occasion for us and a *jashan* ceremony is only slightly more frequent. The *mobeds* who perform these have to come from long distances, giving up a day from their own family pleasures and duties and often at their own cost. The Parsis here feel that they impose on the *mobeds* if they request their services too often. The *mobeds* all have regular jobs of their own which of course has to be their prime concern, thus *mobedi* is a service which they willingly perform as a duty to the community.

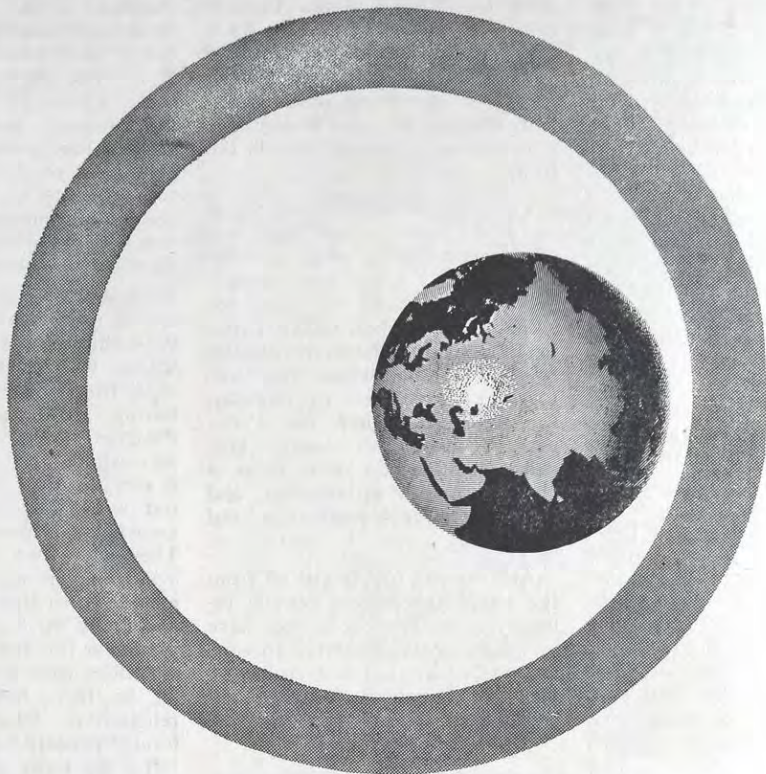
These are problems of the immigrant Parsis, what about Parsi children born or reared here; where will their Parsi identity come from? The immigrant Parsis having grown up in India or Pakistan at least know who they are, where their roots are, and if they do not know their religion too well, they have at least a knowledge of it as a *living* religion. They have seen the inside of an *agiary* or an *atash-behram*, they have been to Iran-Shah in Udvada and know the significance of that particular fire and the promise our ancestors gave before it, to hold on to their identity and their religion—in what was then a foreign country for them.

To the Parsi child growing up in the United States it is very difficult to know who he is and what his religion is. A few have knowledgeable parents who will teach them a little of our history and our prayers; most will by example learn from their parents the ethics of Zoroastrianism but the child never sees here his religion as a living religion. He will not see the rituals performed. He will not know the dark, cool interior of an *agiary* or *atash-behram* or its smell of *sukhar* or hear the clanging of the bell and the music of the *mobed's* prayer as the *geh* is changed. It may even be difficult for the child to believe that in an *agiary* or *atash-behram* the fire must burn always and continuously, and that fire traces its source to the fire brought from Iran and through that, through flames kept alive through thousands of years to perhaps that fire blessed by Zarathustra himself.

Will a child brought up with-



“Being a Parsi, however, I have something that for me does not change with my location—it is my identity as a Parsi.”



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"He will not know the dark, cool interior of an agiary or atash-behram or its smell of sukhar or hear the clanging of the bell and the music of the mobed's prayer as the geh is changed."

out these influences, remain a Zoroastrian? I think we are asking for a miracle if we want this to happen. Yet if the community is to survive in this country this miracle must be performed, as it was performed nearly 1,400 years ago in India. Will we have the ability to perform it? One does not know. Should we even try it? Can our lives be meaningful if we do not? One does not know even the answer to that!

The problems above derive from what the child misses; what about the problems caused by growing up with children who have never heard of a religion called Zoroastrianism? Or worse, children who have heard the name Zoroaster associated only with magic (the word magic is derived from Magi—a Zoroastrian priest of Sassanian times). How does this child still remain a Zoroastrian when he or she is

continuously influenced by Judeo-Christian ideas? How can the child remain a Zoroastrian when the idea of America itself is to be the melting pot of all the cultures of the world? Would it not be un-American to be a Zoroastrian? Of course this idea of the melting pot is not as strong as it may seem; partly it is an ideal. Almost every American proudly traces his origin (through a mere 200 years at best) to his origins in Britain, Italy, Germany, Poland, Ireland or any other country of Europe and Asia. If he is Jewish he traces his origin thousands of years back. So it is certainly not un-American to be a Zoroastrian. America after all is, above all, the land of individual freedom and this includes the freedom to follow your own religion, thus there is hope, despite the forces that would try and blend us into oblivion.

It appears to me then that if our community does not survive into the second and third generation and further, it will not be because American society has hungrily absorbed us but because we will not have taken precautions against it. If the Zoroastrian child in the U.S. does not know his community beyond the family and a few select friends, if he has no chance to grow up

"The fire of Zoroastrianism is no longer a huge conflagration attracting thousands to its ways of life, it is rather a candle in the heart of every Zoroastrian."

with other Zoroastrian children except his brothers and sisters, if he sees that he is alone in the situation of being a Zoroastrian child, then one can hardly blame him if he refuses to bear the burden and pride of being a Zoroastrian. And a burden it is, for it is not easy for a child to learn that he is different, unless he is proud of this difference knows where it comes from and knows that it has always been so for 1,400 years. Thus for the community to survive, our children must not only have their identity as Zoroastrians and Parsis but also be proud of it and desire to keep it from generation to generation. This sense of identity must be built and reinforced. He must know what his religion has to offer and that it is a religion which in its basic principles allows one to function exceedingly well in a modern and mobile society.

In a fast changing world we must adapt to change, but not so that we disappear. How shall we do this? No one person can give the answer, the answer must be arrived at by bringing our heads together and working out solutions in the light of the society we live in, solutions that will allow us to function and grow in the present times and at the same time allow us to keep that promise our ancestors gave before Iran-Shah almost 1,400 years ago. Some will say that the two things are not possible but our history tells us otherwise. But if we keep our heads in the sand, instead of using them and assume that we do not have a problem and that all change is bad, then the forecasters, of doom may well prove to be right.

Will Zoroastrianism survive in the United States and Canada? I think it will depend on Zoroastrians themselves. If they believe in themselves, look out after themselves and their religion and most important of all, if they can make

(Continued on page 23, col. 3)

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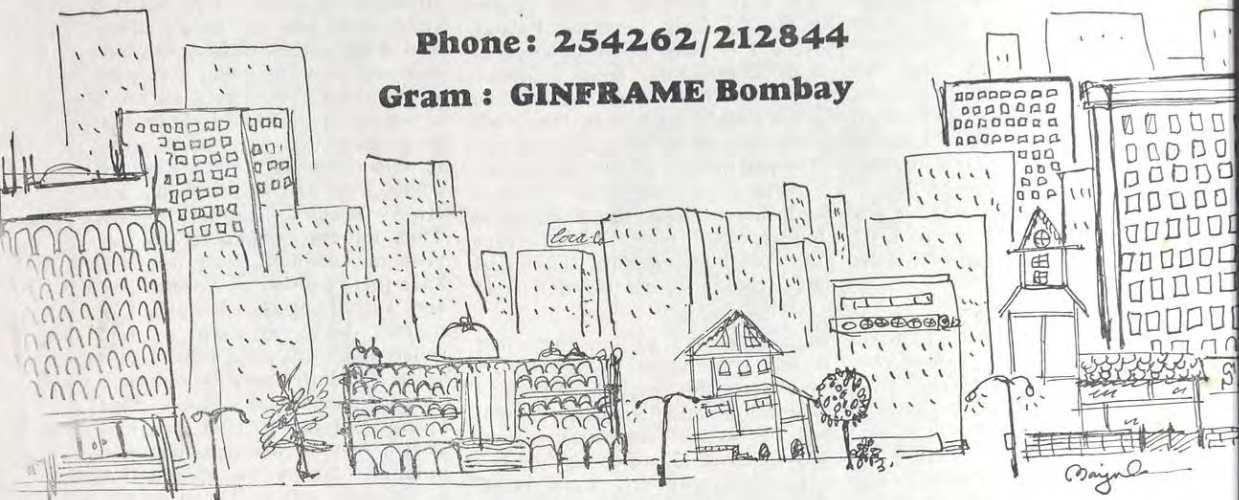
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NEW HORIZONS

A large portion of the Zoroastrians on the American continent reside in Canada. There are at least three Zoroastrian Associations in that rugged northern country, namely the Zoroastrian Society of British Columbia, the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario, and the Zoroastrian Association of Quebec.

Dr. Jehan F. Bagli of Montreal is one of the mainstays of the Quebec association. Aside from the usual paperwork, he has been instrumental in launching the association's newsletter *Gavashni*. In January this year Bagli sent out a questionnaire to Zoroastrians in Canada and the U.S., to gauge their views on the religion. Only five per cent bothered to reply and as he writes "the number is too small to draw any conclusions from... however, from what I have received, with few exceptions, people are largely of the opinion to learn and understand the basic concepts of the Zoroastrian religion and pass it on to the next generation."

Bagli, who left Bombay in 1952 for London and has settled in Canada for the last 14 years, recently visited Bombay. He was keen to learn the views of Bombay Parsis in regard to reforms that need to be incorporated by Zoroastrians abroad, especially in Montreal if they are to survive. In reply to a written questionnaire *Parsiana* sent him after his return, Bagli filed the following answers:

Question: Do you think of yourself as Zoroastrian or as Parsi-Zoroastrian or as Canadian-Zoroastrian?

Answer: I do not like to mix my national identity with my religious identity. Many of us here have accepted Canadian as a national identity, whereas, there are others who have not. This would lead to small groups of different types of Zoroastrians, which we can gladly do without. I believe, we are all Zoroastrians, no matter where we are born or where we come from. The term Parsi, refers to a community, that has a rich history; and that is just where it should stay—in history.

Question: Do you wear the *sudra*

and *kusti* and do you expect your children to do so?

Answer: I do wear the *sudra* and *kusti*. However, I strongly believe that wearing a *sudra* and *kusti* does not make one a Zoroastrian. These are only among the identifying features of the religion. Eliminating these markers could lead to a loss of individuality for the religion, and that is the diametric opposite of my goal and the goal of our organization, viz., the perpetuation of Zoroastrianism. The majority of those who wear these markers know little of the responsibilities that go with them. Conversely, there are many who understand those responsibilities and do not wear the *sudra-kusti*. I do expect my children to wear these markers, but more so, I expect them to understand the



responsibilities that go with this apparel.

Question: How do you view inter-marriage?

Answer: Anybody residing in the Western World in general, and on this North American continent in particular, has to regard inter-marriage, as a direct consequence of their choice to settle in the West. Inter-marriages are not acceptable to Parsis, but should be acceptable to Zoroastrians. Zarathushtra, to the best of my knowledge, has said nothing against inter-marriage. The main reason why Parsis are against inter-marriages is that they have not evolved themselves to accept the consequences of such events. Zoroastrians in North America are in a situation where they would be forced to evolve themselves out of

the Parsi-made laws and arrive at a rational and logical solution for the acceptance of the consequences of all inter-marriages without distinction.

Question: How do you view the disposal of dead?

Answer: On this point, Zoroastrians abroad have a clear choice between burial and cremation. The question of the Tower of Silence does not come into the picture.

Of the two options, the earth must be protected from being filled up by dead bodies and thereby put out of use for the living. With the suggestion of cremation rises the obvious argument about defiling the element of fire. Fire is the most powerful element of nature and as such beyond pollution. It is a steriliser. From a scientific standpoint, this element of nature, so highly placed in the Zoroastrian theology, is indeed a source of energy, transforming whatever it consumes into heat and light. In the subject under discussion, heat is the functional component, and can be utilised with great efficiency, in the light of modern technology. I must make one distinction here. A fire is not a 'sacred fire' until it has undergone the consecration as per Zoroastrian rituals. Of course, it would be utterly un-Zoroastrian to even think of using 'consecrated fire' for such a use. One must remember, that fire has provided the very essence of life, since time immemorial. Humanity has cooked meat on fire and kept warm from its heat. It is only logical, that the purifying mass of matter—viz., the corpse—be devoured by fire, so as to clear the air around that mess, and to perpetuate this element, so that others alive may survive.

Question: How do you view the community in Bombay?

Answer: The answer to this will have to be based largely on hearsay and little on personal experiences. I believe, that generally the community in Bombay is rich financially, but very poor in their understanding of the basic Zoroastrian concepts. Individuals at the helm of the affairs are paranoid

(Continued on page 25, col. 3)



PARSIS THROUGH FOREIGN EYES

Interviews by Joan Contractor

As the number of Parsis travelling overseas increases, so does the possibility of their meeting and marrying people from other countries. While a large number of such couples settle abroad, a handful do return. There are over 100 foreign women married to Parsis in Bombay. The number of foreign husbands is considerably less as the couples would probably opt for the man's country.

How do these individuals view the Parsi community? How have they been received by it? In what faith would they raise their children? These are some of the questions we put to the twelve

women and one man we interviewed for the following two articles:

"I don't think of my husband as a Parsi. He is just my kind of person," says Nuvart Mehta, who provides an excellent example of how well a person with strong views and a definite sense of identity can adjust to an entirely different environment. Ms Mehta, who used to take part in demonstrations for the Spanish Loyalist cause in her younger days, says that she has found no difficulty in adjusting peaceably with the Parsi community, though she does find that they are clanish. "The thing with Parsis is that

they are modern one minute, old-fashioned the next," she commented while describing how they can be liberal about certain things and yet deeply orthodox about such things as burial practices and religious rites. Ms Mehta has studied Persian history and has not only a good idea about Parsi ceremonies and customs but having grown up as an Armenian Christian in Turkey, who like the Parsis are a minority community in that country, she feels that she has a special insight into the problems and aspirations with which Parsis are faced today. During her childhood, she had been taught to regard the Parsis as the

"All the little old ladies love me. I get on very well with Parsis. The culture shock was zero."

traditional enemies of the Armenian Christians and she speaks of a war in the year 45 AD when the Persians fought the Christians in an unsuccessful attempt to convert them. Ms Mehta believes that this battle proves that the early Zoroastrians were as militant about their religion as any of the other people of the time and possibly as intolerant also. She finds it curious that very few Parsis she has talked to appear to be aware of this conflict.

Ms Mehta went to the U.S.A. to finish her education, from where she eventually took up U.S. citizenship and joined what promised to be an exciting career in the Foreign Service. Her early assignments sent her to Mexico and Latin America, where she picked up Spanish which she speaks fluently. It was during another assignment to Bombay at the USIS that she met her husband; they got married in a simple ceremony at a Bombay church. Though she gave up her diplomatic career, Ms Mehta has continued to remain active, working in a polio hospital for children and as a volunteer in a consumer guidance organization. She also runs a small export business and admits that she feels completely at home in Bombay.

Like Ms Mehta, Ms Bomanjee (not her real name) has lived in Bombay for more than twenty years and through an odd co-incidence also met her husband while working at the USIS. Ms Bomanjee has very definite views on the subject in question and outlined them in her clear, precise, diction, but declined to allow her real name to appear in print. Ms Bomanjee says that she first became aware of the existence of Parsis while studying Asian History at a Mid-western University. After her marriage, though she has integrated perfectly well into her husband's family, she frankly admits that she does not know many Parsis. "The Parsis have a fine old religion but have picked up a great many superstitions which have no part in it,"

she remarks, mentioning some of the things she would like changed. "They have confused their religion with other issues. Like trying to say that Zoroastrianism is much older than it actually is." She also disapproves of the large crowds that gather at Parsi weddings and Navjotes and the large sums of money spent during these occasions. She feels that such gatherings might have been alright in the old days when not many records were kept and live witnesses were needed, but feels they are out of context today. Ms Bomanjee speaks Hindi but not Gujarati because she is against regional languages with their communal bias, and in the same spirit has ensured that her two children can celebrate and enjoy all the religious festivals in India, such as Christmas, Pateti and Ganpati.

"What do I know about the Parsi religion?" repeated Ms Bobbie Patuck with a smile. "I know that I cannot go into a fire temple." "But," continues Ms Patuck, who is a Catholic, "I only believe in one God and know that other people may see him in different ways. It does not matter in what language you pray to him." Ms Patuck is a Parisian who has been in Bombay for twenty years and has managed to retain her French flair for elegance and good food, even while adapting herself to the completely different life-style she had to face when she married into a Parsi family. She says that she has no difficulty in being accepted and found that the older people in the family were in particular most kind and considerate. Speaking in general she says that Parsis as a group are intelligent and charitable, particularly when it comes to helping one another. "They love to work for the community and in this way they serve the country also." On the other hand she regrets the Parsi fondness for outward show, particularly seen at marriages, and feels that in a country where there is much poverty, it shows a certain

lack of sensitivity towards the conditions in which they live. As for Parsi husbands, she feels that they are "good providers" and if they also like a well-kept home and enjoy good food she remarks, "It is not that my husband expects it. But he is accustomed to having these things done for him."

"I think that Parsis are intellectually curious and broad-thinking and very fond of music," says Ms Elizabeth Bharucha, who like Ms Patuck has been in India for many years and who as a devoted musicophile feels especially comfortable with people who are so fond of Western music. It was at the University of Michigan that she met her husband, while she was taking a degree in music and he in engineering. After coming to Bombay Ms Bharucha has spent her time in teaching people the piano and playing the organ for a local Protestant church. She has also written articles and reviews on music and confesses a fondness for writing poetry. Having returned recently from the U.S. she made some interesting observations on the different life-patterns here and in the U.S. She found that whereas her friends in the U.S. imagined her to be very fortunate in having servants, they did not realise that in India servants are more a necessity than a luxury and that there are none of the time-saving gadgets which Western women can use; also there was a lot more work to be done in an Indian household which she describes as being "more formal." She found for example that her friends' children were free to go and prepare their own meals whenever they felt like eating and thinks that this is a good thing because it made them more self-reliant. "Parsi parents are authoritarian. The emphasis is on early toilet training, on not getting dirty, on having everything done for them." Parsi husbands, unlike their Western counterparts, she noted, were not accustomed to helping out with household chores. She

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"Parsis are only taught prayers, they aren't taught the principles of the religion."

was trying to remedy this tendency, she said, by making certain that her children got used to doing some of the work around the house.

Frequent advice on how to straighten her daughter's nose by pulling it, and the wonders of gripe water for a small child, are some of the things Willi Modi finds difficult to accept while trying to adjust to a Parsi way of life. Being a nurse who first came to India to work at a leprosy hospital in South India, she feels that these panaceas are medically unfeasible. In all other respects Ms Modi—who comes from the isolated Faeroe Islands off the coast of Iceland but belonging to Denmark—finds that it is easy for a foreigner to marry into the Parsi community because of their openness to foreigners and their non-vegetarian food habits and also because they don't have as strong a joint family system as do some of the other communities in India. On the other hand, she does feel that they may be too influenced by Western culture and states very firmly, "I want my children to be real Indians." She is most willing that her two-year-old daughter should speak Gujarati, but finds it difficult, because everyone automatically speaks in English to her. She would like her daughter to have a navjote but is puzzled at the habit of some *dasturs* who have already approached her to ask, "When can we do a navjote for your daughter?" Ms Modi, who says that she has not been able to find enough books in English to give her a deeper insight into Zoroastrianism, observes that "Parsis are only taught prayers, they aren't taught the principles of the religion."

"Parsi prayers close the mind to negative thoughts," says Ms Ursula Mistry, who feels that even if they are not understood the prayers have a psychological value. In common with two of the women interviewed who share the bond of having come from German-speaking backgrounds, Ms Mistry appears to

be noticeably pro-Parsi and well adjusted to life in Bombay. She works as a secretary-translator in one of the leading firms in Bombay, practises Yoga, enjoys playing badminton and strumming her guitar. She first heard of Zoroastrians in connection with a description of the Towers of Silence which she came across in school. Later she became familiar with their name through Nietzsche's famous work *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Ms Mistry feels that Parsis make very considerate husbands and that if she had children she would have no hesitation in having their navjotes performed.

"My husband's family is not orthodox. I have no complaints to make about them at all," said Barbara Doongaji, a Swiss German who has been living in Bombay for the last eleven years. Ms Doongaji has a pleasant apartment on Malabar Hill with informal-looking cane furniture. She spends her mornings teaching German. Ms Doongaji has two children, the older one of whom has already had a navjote and when asked what values she hoped to raise her children with, she looked somewhat confused and replied "Why? The best values I suppose."

"There is no difference in the general outlook between Parsis and myself," claimed Eleanor Mirza who is an Austrian and whose introduction to the Parsis was first made through Nietzsche also. Ms Mirza, who works as an interpreter in the German consulate, has studied at universities in both Austria and America. She has three sons who understand Gujarati and know Parsi prayers. They have had their navjotes and identify themselves as Parsis, but Ms Mirza feels that she would like them to reflect both the Indian and Western backgrounds that she and her husband share. "Parsis are kinder to children than Westerners," she notes, and also more possessive. Parsi women in particular can be most forthright and self-assertive,

she claims. She wishes that Parsis would not spend so much time priding themselves on their past achievements and admits to a sense of inadequacy when it comes to the Parsi religion. "What is known about it?" she wanted to know.

Ms Vakeel (not her real name) is a successful business woman who finds that a woman in a managerial capacity has to try fairly hard to be accepted in India. She has always to keep her sense of humour at hand in dealing with her employees. A vivacious blonde with warm brown eyes, Ms Vakeel finds time in spite of her career to do her needlework and collect paintings which are strikingly displayed in her apartment. She is also concerned with the upbringing of her three children whom she wants to grow up into honest, truthful and hardworking citizens, wherever they might choose to live. She complains that Indian children often get spoilt and are not allowed to develop any self-confidence by getting accustomed to servants who do all the work for them. "Parsis are very Western, which makes it easier. They accept diversity," she explains to show that she has not met with any hostility from her Parsi relations. She adds that while Parsis are open any friendly with foreigners, they feel the pressure of poverty in India and their status as a minority group; this tends to make them too conscious of their belongings and perhaps leads them to be over-suspicious in their dealings with employees and servants.

"No, it is the other way around. Parsis have no pride for India," answered Manuela Daruwala when asked whether Parsis were prejudiced against foreigners. Manuela, who comes from California but who, as her name and her dark hair and eyes suggest, has a Mexican heritage, finds that Parsis are a particularly loving group of people. Living in the Dadar Parsi Colony she has encountered no hostility at

(Continued on page 23)

THE ENGLISH CONNECTION

"Have you heard the joke about the Archbishop of Canterbury?" asked Sean Mahoney, squirming at the thought of having to face an interview. Sean (pronounced *shaw'n*) was reluctant, not from any sense of bashfulness, but sitting comfortably in the living room of his Parsi in-laws felt that it would seem somewhat ungrateful for him to disclose his candid views about the community. In spite of his red hair and clear porcelain blue eyes, he blended very casually into his temporary Parsi background. A freelance graphic and interior designer by profession, with diplomas in Art and Design, he likes to work with his hands. He is currently making his own furniture, which he designs himself, and was therefore wearing his *suttar's* outfit of white floppy pants and *ganji* with a slightly studied mixture of pride and defiance.

"The first thing I did after meeting Pervin was to look up the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*," said Sean, not because this compendium of knowledge would supply all the information he wanted to know about his future wife, but because he wanted to learn about the Parsis of whom he had never heard until then. Subsequently his knowledge was amplified while on a visit to India, prior to his marriage, and during the last twelve months when he and Pervin have been trying to settle down in Bombay.

"I like to find out about things... to think a little more deeply about them," explained Sean, which he felt could be one reason why some people might find his views difficult to accept. Basically Parsis were no different from anyone else, he went on cautiously, still thinking no doubt of the Archbishop of Canterbury whose experience he refused to divulge. "The conditions here are very similar to those encountered at home. I had no difficulty in being accepted.

"I find in my dealings—financial and social—with people, I'm more at ease with Parsis. If they say something they are more likely to mean it." But he notes his contact with other communities in India



has been very limited. "One of my good friends in England was a Bengalee designer. He was a reservoir of information on India. He had many western values but not quite as much as Pervin. He was more rooted in India.

"I think this business of aping the West has just gone on too long. If one lives in a country it's silly to behave as if one has nothing to do with it. Parsis appear to have too great a regard for the West; they have adopted English manners, the English language, English clothes... I mean just look at their homes", he said "a portrait of Charles Dickens, a photograph of Queen Elizabeth, a Spanish galleon... As a designer I find it upsetting not to see more things which have a trace of Indian... culture... if you must. I don't mean bronzes and the more obvious things like that. But any materials or anything that would suggest an Indian background."

This attitude was carried to even greater extremes with clothes, he felt, having noticed the Parsi tendency to go about in full shirt, suit, and tie, all of which he felt were unnecessary in an Indian climate. He himself liked to wear a *kurta* which he thought was the most natural and sensible garment for the heat, but he knew that most Parsi men would shudder at the very thought of indulging in such frivolous apparel.

"Parsis have closed minds in regard to certain things," he commented describing one occasion where he went out for dinner where the food, being vegetarian, was being served in *thalis*. The *thalis* were very scratched and his host complained about the fact, but insisted on eating the meal with a knife and fork. "There you are, I told him, now you can see why the *thalis* have scratches on them. To me this little incident brings out what's so wrong about the Parsis. They feel superior about things they have no right to feel superior about. I don't see what's wrong in eating out of *thalis*. We have some Gujarathi friends, and to my way of thinking their way of life is more suitably adapted to the surroundings," he said, emphatically denying that he had come to India with all the standard romantic fantasies and was being critical of the Parsis because they did not live up to his illusions.

"I am not being critical about them," said Sean feeling that all his efforts to take a rational view of things were being thwarted. "I think I had better tell you about the Archbishop of Canterbury." It seems that when the Archbishop of Canterbury went to New York, a reporter went up to him and asked him whether he was going to visit the strip clubs. "Are there any strip clubs in New York?" the Archbishop asked in mild surprise, only to find, that the next morning's newspapers carried as their headlines, "Archbishop of Canterbury wants to know, 'Are there any strip clubs in New York?'"

Having displayed a true Irishman's fondness for telling a story, Sean who claims that in spite of his red hair and very Irish name, he is "no more an Irishman than Pervin is a Persian," wound up the interview by showing me the intriguing coffin shaped music box that lay on the shelf. The metal cylinder rolled around slowly and a delicate Western tune tinkled gaily through the steamy Indian air. "Isn't it a marvellous piece of craftsmanship?" said Sean.

Geeta Doctor

all but feels that this Parsi exclusiveness could have a bad effect on her children. She expressed concern that her children might regard servants as a lower breed of humanity and that they have learnt jokes about members of other communities at their Gujarati school. She feels however that there is a definite advantage in marrying into the Parsi community, because in an era where values are changing so fast as to not have meaning, Parsis have a stable family life and, she notes, "Parsis tend to have a more lasting attitude towards marriage."

Ms Engineer (not her real name) is an Englishwoman who is also concerned with the prejudices that her children might pick up and has noticed that, while they do not make any communal distinctions, they do differentiate between themselves and poorer children. Ms Engineer works with her husband and says that while navjotes have been performed for her children, she would also like to see that they grow up with Christian values. She felt that her children were able to think of themselves both as Parsis and as foreigners and gave the

amusing example of her small son who when asked what he was, solemnly announced, "I am a Parsi Englishman."

"In California all Indians stick together and no communal distinctions are made," said Elena Dorabji, surprised to hear that they are made here. Ms Dorabji who is only on a visit to Bombay and normally lives with her Parsi husband in California, was naturally able to see things from a slightly different perspective. She was most enthusiastic about being part of the Parsi community and says that what struck her most when she first heard about Zoroastrianism in school was that "Zoroastrianism is the oldest monotheistic religion. Somehow that stuck in my mind." She had no trouble in being accepted and frankly admits, "All the little old ladies love me. I get on very well with Parsis. The culture shock was zero." She does not have any children at present but is very definite on how she would like to bring them up when she does have them. "A lot of Indian kids in California," she says, "are kind of embarrassed about their Indian background. I want my kids to know about their Indian roots. I want them to be

proud of their Indian heritage and not feel like second-class citizens. Ideally I would like them to develop an international outlook."

Westward (Continued from page 15)

their children believe in it, and instill in them the faith and pride in ourselves which has stood us through the 1,400 years in India, I see no reason why it will not. If on the other hand, we remain interested only in our close family and our own personal, selfish, well-being and if we ignore the fact that we have obligations beyond family and self to Zoroastrianism, we will not survive. The fire of Zoroastrianism is no longer a huge conflagration attracting thousands to its way of life, it is rather a candle in the heart of every Zoroastrian. Only if these candles remain together will there be a viable fire which will be passed on from generation to generation. If we go our separate ways, then these candles will gradually get extinguished and the fire that Zarathustra started thousands of years ago, will slowly but surely die away because the followers of his religion did not care enough.

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to lead a life of luxury, he wants to stay in posh apartments, own cars, have periodical entertainment and dinners in posh hotels.

While members of other communities work hard, earn degrees and qualifications, our youngsters pass the S.S.C. and seek jobs in banks or insurance companies. When members of other communities meet, they talk and talk about business. Our youngsters talk about which movie is worth seeing. There are immense fields open in the country. Government is out to assist any one who comes forth with plans and ideas to start small or large industries. But no Parsi comes forth to enter into business or small-scale industries. Unless youngsters discard all ideas of luxurious living and devote their time and energy to business we will only be fit for classification as a backward community.

R. N. RUSTOMJI

Lost Horizons

Parsis in foreign countries are ignoring the Parsis of India. By doing so they are moving away

from the community. Their children are educated abroad in 'factories'. Their parents have no knowledge of what 'Parsi' means, so they fail to educate their offspring in religious matters.

Fifty years ago Parsis who went abroad had one foot in the foreign country and the other in India.

Today the Parsis who leave for foreign countries, do not bother to know or belong to the religion and community in India. Their children are lost. I am sure there are many who would like to speak out in public whether they are happy with their new lot, and whether they choose to return.

I know several U.K. Parsi families, with aged members, unemployed, living on pensions or on small capitals, unable to meet expenses, without servants or help, wanting to return to India for peace and religious surroundings, but they have now no contacts. The Bombay Parsis should help them.

SAROSH KHAJOTIA
London

about making adjustments in the Zoroastrian way of life, thus putting into jeopardy the very survival of this great religion. There is little leadership in a group of Zoroastrians that should constitute the guiding light for the small groups around the world. This attitude is forcing the smaller groups to find adjustments to suit their circumstances, while at the same time, attempting to perpetuate Zoroastrianism. This could lead to unwanted fragmentation of the Zoroastrians. The greatest weakness of the Bombay community leaders is their lack of understanding of the 'Mean' (between excess and deficiency)—a cornerstone of Zoroastrian ethics. This has resulted in their inability to compromise with the generation of today, those traditions which have been handed down without necessarily disturbing the foundation stones of the religion.

To sum up, Zoroastrianism—a religion without dogmas—in Bombay, is heading to the defeat of its own purpose because of its degeneration into dogmatic theology.

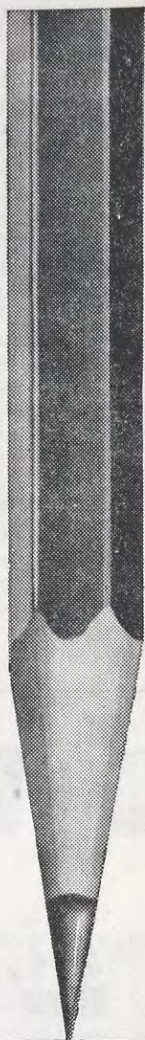
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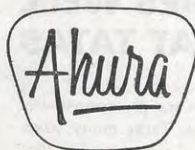
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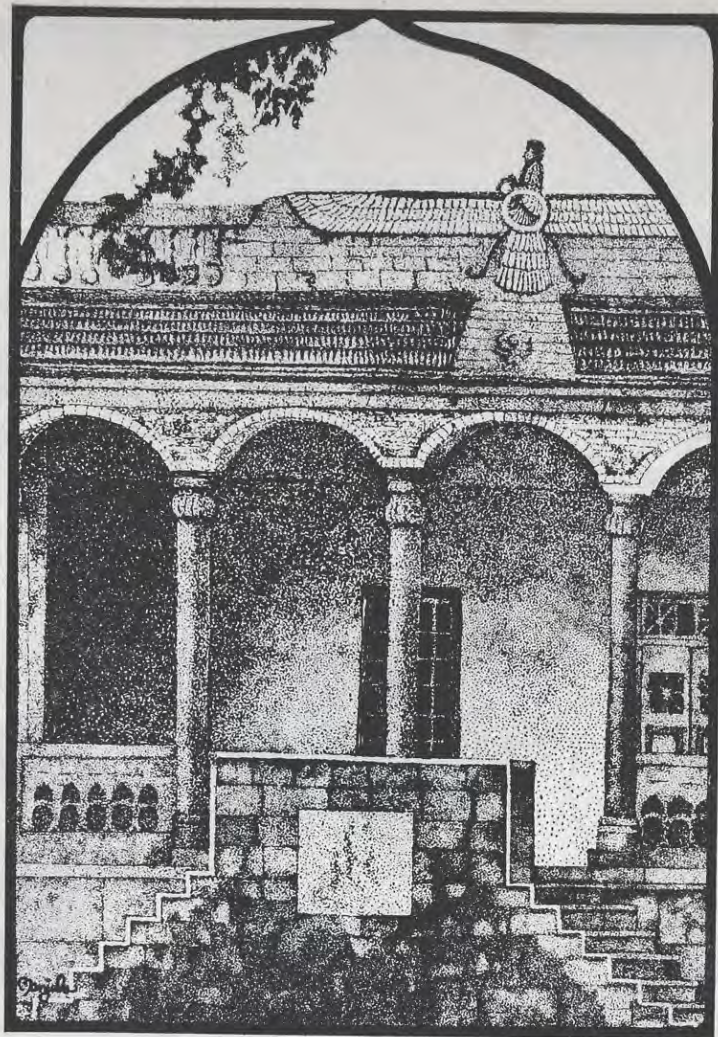


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Sketch by Manjula Padmanabhan

THE ETERNAL FLAME OF YAZD

Amir Taheri, editor of the English daily, Kayhan International, published in Teheran, is among the first non-Zoroastrians permitted to enter the fire temple in Yazd. In an article titled "The Immortal Fire" he tells of the experience.

In Yazd we visited the Zoroastrian fire temple at night. We had to strike a match to see our way through the hallway. The small glimmer faded out in a few seconds but it helped us see our way.

Inside the temple a small fire

was burning in a brass brazier. The heart of an entire civilization was aglow there, the small fire was reminiscent of a great past.

We were among the very few non-Zoroastrians admitted to the inner temple where the holy fire is ablaze. The first non-Zoroastrian to gain admission to the inner temple was Princess Margaret who came to Iran over a year ago. She was admitted because she had written a thesis on the Mazdean religion.

We were admitted not because

of any thesis but in our capacity as journalists, "people who should speak the Truth," according to the Mubad (Priest) guarding the holy fire.

According to legend the oldest Zoroastrian fire still ablaze is some 4,000 years old. It is preserved and revived five times a day at the fire temple of the Parsees in India. The fire in Yazd is only 700 years old although the city once had the oldest fire temple in Iran.

The old fire temple was turned



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into a mosque after the Muslim invasion of Iran. It was then that the Zarathustrans took the holy fire with them and left for India.

Taheri goes on to note: The history of Zarathustranism is, in fact, the history of Iran until the appearance of Islam. From then on it is a history of unrivalled heroism, suffering and steadfastness in the face of misery and persecution. We have evidence that most Iranians were still faithful to their ancestral religion even two centuries after the advent of Islam. Later, however, Iranian dynasties, notably the Buyids, did much to force the Mazdeans to become Muslims.

Forced conversions were the practice even until 60 or 70 years ago. Around Yazd there are villages inhabited by people called the *jadidis* (the newly converted) who have mixed the Mazdean religion with Islam and who have both Zarathustran and Muslim names.

It is only in recent years that the Zarathustrans of Yazd have succeeded in reaching a *modus vivendi* with their Muslim fellow citizens. There were no massacres of the Zarathustrans in the past but nothing was done to make their lives particularly enjoyable.

Today, they are an important community in Yazd, they have their own association and Majlis deputy, and seem to be getting along fairly well with other religious groups in the town. Their dream is to encourage their fellow Zarathustrans to return "home" from India. Some Parsees of India still consider Iran their rightful fatherland as well as the "holy country" of Mazda. So far, however, only a few of them have returned to this country.

Marriage within the confines of the community over several centuries has led to the creation of a distinct Zarathustran type that is easily recognisable. But the claim of racial purity and Aryanism advanced by some Mazdean hotheads has no basis in fact. Many Negro slaves and Turkish servants of the Zarathustrans were converted to the religion centuries ago adding their own racial characteristics to the blend. At the same time it is

certain that many marriages took place between the Parsees of India and the natives of that country in the early stages of the Zarathustran settlement in the subcontinent.

Isolating themselves, the Zarathustrans certainly succeeded in maintaining most of their original characteristics, folklore and traditions. But they would be difficult to understand as a community if separated from the general Iranian context within which they have been living.

Talking to leading Zarathustrans in Yazd, I was amazed to find that they held so many Muslim prejudices to be "pure truth". Zarathustranism has definitely influenced Christianity, Judaism and Islam. But its influence on Shi'ism, the Iranian version of Islam, is particularly marked. Talking to the Yazdi Mazdeans confirmed my previous thoughts concerning the inter-action of Mazdean religion and Shi'ism.

Until a few years ago the Zarathustrans considered the question of accepting new converts as "unthinkable". Today, they are beginning to change their minds. For one thing they have realized that many Iranian Muslims are becoming attracted to their ancestral faith for nationalistic reasons. This attraction has led to a situation in which Mazdean scholarship is no longer reserved to the Zarathustrans. Most of our leading authorities on the religion and its history are now Muslims.

The question of conversion was raised during a stormy session of the association in Teheran a few months ago. The old guard were fuming with rage when the subject was tabled. But the younger thinkers supported "an open door" policy.

In the end it was decided that "outsiders" married to Zarathustrans should be accepted into the "family" provided they wish it. Scores of Zarathustrans educated in America and Europe have foreign wives who can now become Mazdeans.

It was also decided that the *jadidis* (the newly converted) should be readmitted to the fold if they desire. So far, however, no active attempts have been made to gain new converts. ©

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APPLY TO PRINCIPAL FOR ADMISSION

Women on the Panchayat: A Lack of Trust?

Interviews by Feroza Paymaster

Though Parsi women outnumber men by 46,470 to 44,796 their standing in the community is far inferior to their numerical clout. They are second class citizens in the political, religious, social and economic spheres. If they marry out their children are not considered Parsis; during menstruation they are treated as untouchables, barred from attending any place of worship. But nowhere is the discrimination as blatant and obvious as it is on that premier institution of Parsis throughout the world: the Bombay Parsi Panchayat. The rules of that august body permit only three of the seven trustees to be women at any given time, thus ensuring a male dominated Panchayat. Before this law came into effect in 1970, they were limited to one seat. At present there are only two women trustees: Lady Hirabai Jehangir and Dr. Nelie Noble. So our interview question, is the limit of three fair, could be considered an academic one. But we asked it in the hope that it may arouse an awareness amongst Parsis, women in particular, and goad them onto action. (Photos: Farokh Reporter)



Rumi Daruwalla, 34, Project Engineer, Tata Electric Companies

"Why should sex be a condition? I don't think this rule is necessary. Maybe it was framed to satisfy the male ego by making men feel that females are inferior. I would definitely vote against it. If someone is fit to be in a position and has worked for it, to be barred just because that person is a female, is not fair.

"Rather than have a majority of either of the sexes, there should be a balance of the two. Men get along better with women and vice versa. Like in our typing pool, for instance, if there were a couple of more men, things would be more peaceful." As to whether men are better administrators than women, Daruwalla says "It is difficult to

answer generally. There have been specific examples when women have made men look like fools. I think their capabilities would be equal to those of men. Women are more trustworthy, than men; this is just an impulsive opinion though."

As regards Parsi women being second class citizens, Daruwalla feels "our community is quite broad-minded, and women are given an equal status. Hardly one or two per cent could be following customs like the menstruation taboos." But, of the children of non-Parsi fathers and Parsi mothers not being considered Parsi, he says "I am afraid this is discrimination."



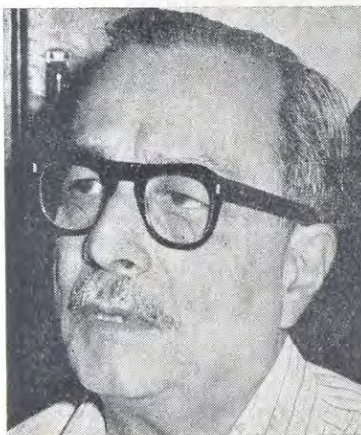
Aban Irani, 29, Housewife

"I think there should be four males and two females. Two women are more than enough. If more than two women meet, there is bound to be a fight. Women only know how to deck up. They also give up more easily, say they are tired, their saris are getting crumpled, and ask others to do the job." Aban feels women "have brains, and if they are capable, will be good administrators. They can do a good job of charitable and other such work." But she would rather have all male trustees than all female.

"There is usually a limit to the number of women in large organisations because we cannot do with-

out men. Men run everywhere and are more helpful. They are also superior and more knowledgeable from birth. They should get more respect."

As for Parsi women being second class citizens, Aban believes, "women enjoy the same status as men in our community". Customs such as the menstruation taboos are respected because "they have been done since ages. It is nonsense, but then much depends on one's upbringing." She feels it is fair that the children of Parsi males married out of the community are considered Parsi and not those of Parsi females, since it is "the man who gives the surname."



Dr. Rustem Colah, 62, Drug Analyst

"I would definitely vote for a change. It makes no difference to me whether there are male or female trustees, provided they can deliver the goods. I'd rather have people who are efficient and have modern ideas, not people who are too old to think of 1974 and can only think in terms of 1930.

"Women can be as good administrators as men but they do not get as many administrative posts as men do. It is probably due to the Indian tendency to believe that males are superior. Women are as trustworthy as men but fight more

easily. The number of quarrels in buses and trains one finds caused by women!"

Colah feels, "women are discriminated against in the Parsi community. The very fact that there are only two women in the Panchayat proves it." The menstruation taboos, Colah believes, are another form of discrimination. "However, such biases are lessening," he notes. As for children of non-Parsi fathers and Parsi mothers not being considered Parsis he says "it may be discrimination but it has been ingrained in us for years."



Khorshed Bilimoria, 48, Teacher, J. B. Petit High School

"It's discrimination and I would vote against it. It's a male dominated world. This is not because women are in any way inferior, on the contrary, they are tougher, take things more easily, but they are devoted and want harmony. That is why they are dominated.

"Women are as efficient as men in certain fields of administration. They may not be business-minded, but the running of a school or hotel, is more of a woman's job. Women do tend to bicker and be

petty-minded," she admits, "but men too can be that way." Trustworthiness too "depends on the nature of the men and women concerned. Sex has nothing to do with it."

As for Parsi women being second class citizens, Ms Bilimoria exclaims "No, no I don't think so at all." The menstrual taboos she thinks are no longer adhered to. Children of non-Parsi fathers and Parsi mothers not being accepted by the community she feels "is very cruel."

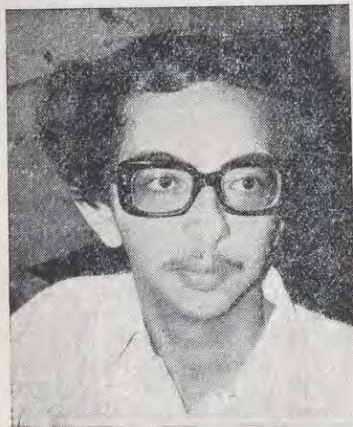


Zarine Cardmaster, 26, Secretary, NOCIL

"There should be no fixed rule. Trustees should be elected on merit and not just because they are male or female. It's capacity that counts. It doesn't make a difference whether he or she is young or old. Some older people are more broad-minded. She feels that it was the concept of "male superiority" that led to the framing of such a rule. "I don't think males are better administrators. It depends on the person really. The tendency to fight too depends on the nature of the

individual. By and large women are also more honest and trustworthy."

Parsi women are not second class citizens according to Zarine. If they were, "it was never the males who treated them differently it was always the older women." However, "nowadays you can't afford to observe the menstruation taboos. It was different when there were bigger houses. Now if a mother does the cooking she cannot help but be near the fire."



Berjis Desai, 18, Junior B.A., Elphinstone College

"The whole system is at fault. If merit was taken into consideration, there would be no question of either a male or female majority." He feels this rule was framed because "the position of women not only in our community, but in India itself, was not very high. There was no Women's Lib, the literacy level among women was low and there were no opportunities for women to be in the public light. I think these conditions have changed now. Our constitution guarantees an equal status for men and women."

Berjis feels "males are superior administrators. It may sound chauvinistic, but I feel males have

the power of making decisions. Women are very easily dominated although they may appear to be most powerful. They are positively as trustworthy as men, but jealousy and feminine squabbles are very prevalent among them."

As to the position of women in the community, Berjis says "they are quite an emancipated lot. Much more so than among other communities in India." The menstruation taboos, he says "are all outdated, except maybe among the priestly class." Children of Parsi mothers and non-Parsi fathers not being considered Parsis, he notes, is a "gross injustice. Some one should go to court and get this matter cleared."



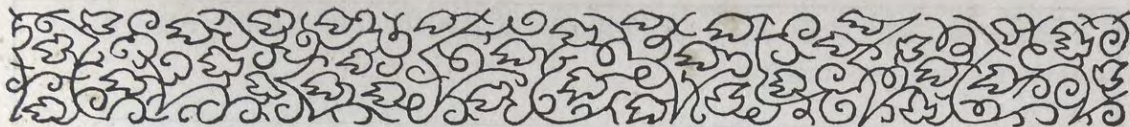
Meher Kotwal, 58, Housewife

"Trustees should be elected on merit. Intelligence is important and not the sex. They should not be all male or all female, but people who can do the work. I would not object to either majority so long as the community is benefited. If women are highly qualified, they could run the institutions well, and if there are women who are more intelligent and can push our community ahead, then why not have women?"

Ms Kotwal feels the reason for the ban "is probably because women do a lot of *kit-kit* and keep putting hindrances. Even at meetings we see that there is a

long *dastan*. Where there are more women, less work gets done. Men can work better. I feel men are superior administrators, I don't deny that and of course they are easier to get on with and more trustworthy. However, today women are more brainy. Girls are getting more educated than the boys, though there are exceptions to the rule."

Ms Kotwal says that old taboos are not observed any more, "times are changing" and the Parsi woman is not treated as a second class citizen in the community.



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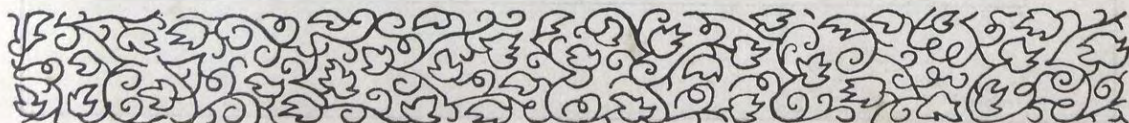
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UDWADA: THE KING & THE VAZIR

Researched by Feroza Paymaster

While the question of whether there are too many fire temples in Bombay or not continues to rage, in Udwada people are wondering if two are enough. For though the *atash behram* in this dilapidated city of pilgrimage houses the revered *Iranshah*—the oldest fire said to originate from Iran—there is a group who believe its presence must be complemented by an *adaran*, a structure in which an associate fire burns. The group who are followers of the religious mystic, Minocher Pundole, note that every *atash behram*, with the exception of Dadyseth, has an *adaran* and, therefore, as Pundolite Phiroze Batliwala notes, "the *Iranshah* must have a vazir."

According to Batliwala when the Parsis came to India they consecrated the *Iranshah* fire and also the fire belonging to the *adaran*. While the *Iranshah* was ultimately shifted to Udwada, the whereabouts of the *adaran* is open to speculation. Pundole is said to believe it is salvaged in the Goti *adaran* at Surat. "In order to give *Iranshah* its due Pundole has taken up this venture to have an *adaran*," says Batliwala.

The Udwada priests led by Dastur Hormazdiar Mirza disagree with the Pundolites. In a pamphlet printed in Gujarati by the Udwada Athornan and Behdin Anjuman and signed by its Secretary, Sohrabji Maneckji Mirza, they note the *Iranshah* fire has been with the community for the last 1,253 years and for all that time the 'King' never felt the need for a 'vazir'. If such an *adaran* was essential, they note, our forefathers, who were even more religiously devout, would certainly have established an *adaran*. The Udwada Anjuman was established in 1831 with rights to look after the conduct of the priests, ceremonies and the management of fire temples within its jurisdiction. The leaflet also points out that in Udwada, Navsari, Surat and neighbouring towns the number of practising priests is fast declining and that in several villages of Gujarat, fire temples have been closed down due to the pau-

city of funds and non-availability of priests. In Udwada, they note, during the last 27 years as many as 70 performing priests were registered in the records of the Anjuman out of which only seven are now performing ceremonies like *Yajashne Vendidad* etc. The Anjuman also claims there are two spacious buildings, one of *Iranshah* and the other of the *Petit Agiary* with facilities for *Paumehel* ceremonies for 19 pairs (*pavis*) and though in the past all these used to be occupied, today not even 40 per cent are utilized at a time.

Mirza and the Anjuman state the controversy started four years ago when Behramshah Bharda, a priest, along with another, allegedly tried to make changes in the *Nirangdin* ceremony. According to the Anjuman in spite of several warnings not to deviate from the traditional systems, they persisted in doing so and hence were denied permission to perform the *Nirangdin* ceremony. The ban was later rescinded. The Anjuman claims Behramshah is a staunch disciple of Pundole, a person who professes to possess mystical powers and at whose instance Behramshah made changes in the ceremonies he performed. The Anjuman's displeasure at the deviation is what allegedly piqued the Pundolites to set up the *adaran*.

Undaunted by the Anjuman's opposition, the Pundolites reportedly collected funds from their followers for the *adaran*. Kaikobad Sidhwa, proprietor of the Globe Hotel and a devotee of Pundole, donated the land in memory of his wife, Pirojabai. Before the construction could begin, the Pundolites sought the permission of the Collector at Bulsar as the Gram Panchayat Act requires sanction for any religious building work.

The Anjuman countered with a memorandum reportedly signed by around 700 Udwada Zoroastrians urging the authorities not to permit construction, as the *adaran* was not necessary and would be a cause of dispute in the small town. The Collector after many meetings, deliberations and a personal

visit to the beleaguered city granted permission. The Anjuman filed an appeal before the Gujarat Government and threatened to take the matter to court should the Pundolites begin construction.

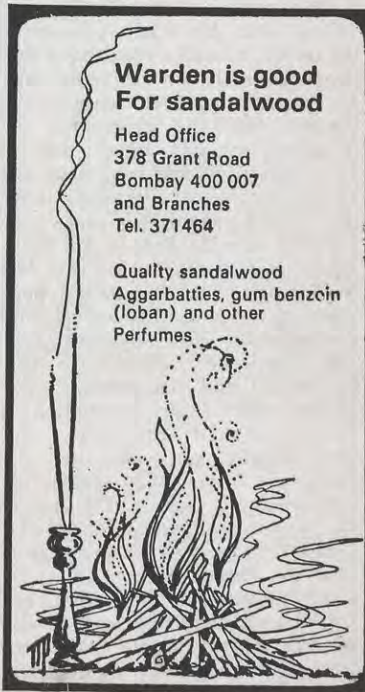
The controversy has created much bitterness in its wake. Recently when a trustee of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat was handing out money to some *mobeds* in the *atash behram*, a priest sprang up and berated his companions for accepting hand-outs from an "enemy of *dokhmanasini*". Immediately the other priests retorted by alleging that the accusing priest was himself the lackey of another trustee, who is a follower of Pundole. The timely appearance of the head priest prevented a scuffle. But the outburst was only a symptom of the deeper malaise afflicting the Zoroastrian mecca.

Wanted: A copy of "Zoroastrianism Ancient and Modern" by Ervad Phiroze Shapurji Masani (1917). Contact M. P. Polson, Moti Mahal, Sir D. Vatcha Road, Churchgate Reclm., Bombay 400 020. Phone: 250387.

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Making Beautiful Music by Geeta Doctor

Ms Coomi Wadia, Conductor of the Paranjoti Academy Chorus of Bombay, has returned recently from a tour of Europe, where her choir received the first prize at the International Choral Festival of Miezyszdroje. The trophy was given by the Polish Broadcasting and Television services.

A small boy watched intently as his mother climbed the conductor's podium. There was a short pause before Coomi Wadia raised her arms and led the Paranjoti choir through another inspired performance. Every time a particular piece was over, she turned and bowed gravely at the audience, always remembering, however, to reserve a smile for the very special member in the audience. For Ms Wadia, music is very much a shared family experience, for besides her son, her husband, Nariman Wadia, is not only the Assistant Conductor of the choir, but one of its chief male singers also. Asked to describe how it felt like to sing to his wife's tune Mr. Wadia said exuberantly, "Wonderful! She makes beautiful music."

"We perform the most pagan things," said Ms Wadia commenting on the mistaken idea that most people have, that choral music must necessarily mean "church music". Almost half the programme is composed of folk music, and a great many of these have been arranged by Victor Paranjoti himself from Konkani folk songs and pastoral refrains known for their gaiety and liveliness. To this Ms Wadia has added a varied repertoire of songs, both classical and contemporary with languages ranging from the Japanese to the Norwegian and Hungarian. "We rarely sing from translations," she said and explained that she usually got all the assistance from the embassies concerned to explain the meaning and the pronunciation of the songs. It is perhaps for this reason that the Paranjoti choir could be truly considered an international choir, and effectively answer the objections that people may raise against it that it is Westernized music. "I don't consider it Western



Ms Wadia: A lack of appreciation

music at all, but international music," said Mr. Wadia, while his wife described how one of their most distinctive pieces was a composition in Sanskrit, by Vanraj Bhatia. "He has taken a sloka from the *Bhagwad Gita* and created a composition for three choirs singing together. He has a highly distinctive style which is very modern. Our audiences found it very beautiful.

"At Miezyszdroje, which is a beach resort which attracts the summer crowds from Warsaw, every choir had to give a preview which was held right on the beach. It was free. Anyone could come. We just stood there and sang, maybe for almost 15 minutes. It didn't matter one bit that we were not on a stage."

"In Poland we received tremendous appreciation" said Ms Wadia. "At the end of one performance, a man came towards me, picked up the hem of my saree and kissed it. I was absolutely amazed. We did not know of course that we had won the prize. The news was cabled to us when we were in Denmark. There were fifteen choirs and

each choir sang for an evening, so we could not hear the others. It could be that there was more variety in our group, and people enjoyed listening to all the different styles."

In contrast Ms Wadia could not help but mention the comparative lack of encouragement that the choir had to face in Bombay. "People won't mind going if it is a foreign concert. They will only go if they are told it is a French choir. It doesn't matter if it happens to be a third-rate choir. They do not know, or care to know, that there is an internationally famous choir right here. I've had standing ovations whenever we have sung to audiences outside India. While here, I feel truly hurt when no one even comes up to say that we sang well.

"Good choir singing comes from continuously singing together," explained Ms Wadia describing the highly disciplined skill required in coordinating this "human instrument" to produce music. "It means a lot of hard work and practice. Most people who come to me do not have a musical background. In the West, musical graduates who have already received their training are auditioned by conductors. Here I tell them 'I will make you a musician' and start from there." The best way for a new singer to learn was to sing at the side of a good singer, she said, also adding that it might be at least one and a half years before the person would be able to perform. So that while it was primarily the Conductor's task to blend and guide the singers to create the required effect, each one of them had to put in a great deal of sacrifice and time.

"Communist countries have the discipline which is essential for a good choir," remarked Ms Wadia who having attended the International University Choral Festival at the Lincoln Centre for the Performing Arts in New York as an observer/conductor, had the opportunity to listen to some of the best choirs from all over the world. She noticed that the American choir was the only one which

was not permanent. They had selected four of the best singers from the ten leading universities. "The odd thing was," she noted, "that they had the best singers but the chorus was not as well knit as the others who were used to singing together all the time."

"We are really like a family," she said of the Paranjoti choir who make a splendid visual impression on the stage with the women in brilliant red Benaras sarees with gold motifs, standing in front of the men clad in black shutcoats. Ms Wadia stands in front, a small slim figure, in a saree identical to the other ladies but in black silk; as the chorus start to sing she seems to grow taller and more commanding till in the end one only notices her.

"We used to have more Parsis in the past," Ms Wadia noted, "but really now we have people from all communities." There are more women than men and a great many of her singers are students. "I want young people to make good music," she noted. But there are older people also who are accountants, secretaries and housewives. Ms Wadia herself works in an advertising company which seems all but incredible considering the effort she puts into the choir. For apart from conducting it, she also organises the more practical aspects of having a concert, the tickets, the programme, and the advertisements. "I am exacting," she admits, "without being exacting you can't achieve anything."

It was while singing with the Bombay Madrigal Society under Victor Paranjoti that Coomi Wadia met her future husband who belongs to the well-known K. Wadia family of jewellers. Mr. Wadia, who in the programme brochure is shown with a beard, wearing what he describes as his "St. John the Baptist look" related an amusing incident which occurred during their last trip when he was stopped at the Customs barrier of one of the Communist countries. "I had grown a beard during the course of an illness I had last year, but my passport showed me clean shaven. So the chap looked at the photograph and then at my beard and insisted that I should shave it off right there. And that is exactly what I had to do."

Both the Wadias started off with an early interest in the piano, but from the moment they heard the Paranjoti choir they dedicated themselves wholly to choral music. Ms Wadia talked almost reverently of Paranjoti's musical genius and felt that continuing the Paranjoti choir was the aptest way of paying tribute to his memory. "I learnt a lot from him. The music we made together was so enjoyable and he had a great regard for my musical ability." In following in Victor Paranjoti's footsteps, Ms Wadia made it clear, however, that she did not believe in walking under his shadow. "People come up and say to me, 'He didn't do this. Why are you doing it?' I refuse to be an imitator of Paranjoti. Each one is an individual and you

have first of all to be true to yourself."

"Music," she felt also, speaking with deep conviction, "is God's gift," and this had necessarily influenced her attitude to her religion. "We all worship the same God and follow his teachings. I think people need something to hang on to. Prayers and my belief in God have given me great strength through a very taxing period in my life. Music to me is the height from which you can reach God. Through this gift, if you have it in you, you can find the ideal way of worshipping him."



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The Paranjoti Choir: 'We perform the most pagan things' (Pic by Farokh Reporter)

In memoriam

The death of Neville Chinoy on September 9th in an aeroplane disaster over the Middle East left an immeasurable void both in the world of music and amongst his family and friends. Though he was only 19, his mastery at the piano earned him praise from all quarters as well as a three-year scholarship at the Curtis School of Music in Philadelphia. Sheryar Ookerjee, an old family friend of the Chinoy's, visited them a few days prior to Neville's ill-fated departure and recalled seeing the young pianist seated shirtless before the piano playing Bach. Ookerjee writes:

One could see his broad muscular back and shoulders, his powerful forearms and hands. He sat like a rock, head bent slightly down, looking with full concentration at the keys; only his fingers and arms moved. His hands were relaxed and beautifully poised.

Only a few days earlier someone had requested him to play the *Italian Concerto* but he said he was "not ready"; yet today he played it without a score and a few days later performed it with exquisite shading and beauty. This incident was characteristic of Neville. Though shy and unpretentious he was not reluctant to play for you but he was extremely self-critical and would not perform if he was "not ready."

Neville had prodigious technical mastery. To see his deft fingers beating out the thundering chords of the *Appassionata* or flying with incredible swiftness through the complexities of Chopin's *Grand Polonaise* would have made one think they were the easiest of pieces. He himself said they were "not very difficult" and this was no affectation. There was nothing affected about Neville; he put on no airs. His playing was devoid of



any attempts at showing off or of those unpleasant mannerisms so many pianists pick up. He did not shake his head or look up dreamily at the ceiling or crouch over the keyboard in the soft passages.

His was a genuine absorption in the task before him. Either as a young boy in shorts sporting an elegant bow tie and entertaining the audience during the intervals at some college dramatic competition or playing with an orchestra, his devotion to music was total. He disapproved of pianists who "cheated". He specially referred to Rachmaninoff's *Second Piano Concerto*, in which even great pianists omitted playing some of the difficult notes in the score. He himself possessed artistic integrity and hoped to master and play the concerto without "cheating" soon after he got to Philadelphia. He admitted that Rachmaninoff was very difficult and so was Liszt. At times Neville had doubts whether he was really good enough to take music as a career. Those who heard and saw him play had no such doubts. As one of his teachers said, there was no music for the piano that Neville could not have tackled.

Devoted as he was to music, he was devoted to his family to a degree unusual in an age of "alienation" and "generation gaps". At

the age of 13 he began to study under Kendall Taylor in England, but he felt so home-sick that he returned to Bombay within a few months. When his father was asked whether Neville regretted very much that his studies had to be cut short he replied, "Not at all, he is perfectly happy to be here."

Now that he was much older he could stick it out at Philadelphia, but every long vacation brought him back to Bombay, and he refused to leave till the very last day of the vacation. "If you keep your departure right to the very end, what will happen if you fall ill?" his father asked him. "I'm very strong," said Neville, "even if I'm ill I'll still be able to fly."

Neville lived for only a third of the normal human span, but he packed into it what most others do not fit into twice that time; he lived his life to the brim. It was extinguished too soon, but while he had it he made it shine very brightly.

Major and Ms Rustom Vazifdar; in a car accident while touring with their son and daughter-in-law in Nevada, America. Major Vazifdar, 58, was the Chief Engineer of the Bombay Port Trust from which he retired in September after 37 years of service. His wife,



Maj. and Ms Vazifdar

Aloo (nee Mehta) was in charge of Public Relations for Fariyas Hotel.

The couple were eminent members of the community who distinguished themselves in many spheres. Major Vazifdar played a notable part in the development of the Bombay Port. He was Chairman of the Institute of Engineers (Bombay) and was connected with a number of technical institutions and committees appointed by the Indian Government. He had published over 20 papers on various aspects of dock and harbour engineering.

A graduate in civil engineering from Bombay University, Major Vazifdar joined the Port Trust in 1938. He opted for war service and from 1942 till the end of the War was with the Corps of Royal Indian Engineers in which he saw active service in the Middle East and South East Asia. He won the Burma Star, the War Medal, Defence Medal and was the recipient of a Japanese sword. The Major was a Freemason of 30 years standing and a keen Rotarian.

Ms Vazifdar, a post graduate degree holder in English Literature was active in rehabilitation centres and social work. She took up the public relations post because, as her family members explained, "she loved to work with people." She was a veteran gardener and won a prize from The Friends of The Trees for her garden in Powai. She and the Major were trustees on the Shirinbai Dinshaw Trust.

Major Vazifdar was to have taken up a United Nations post in Indonesia as a consultant on ports and harbours. The couple had gone to America to visit their son, Phiroze, and daughter-in-law, Makiko. It was while swerving to avoid an oncoming vehicle that the Vazifdars' car rolled over an embankment and in its tragic wake cut short the couple's well-lived lives.

Jehangir Manchershah Ranina, 79, Honorary Secretary of the Rahnumae Mazdayasnan Sabha, and an active member of various other Zoroastrian associations and trusts; in a car accident on 26th August. An advocate by profession, he held many responsible posts, his last being as Official Liquidator under J. D. Choksey for Air India and the Air India International companies following nationalization.

Aside from the Rahnumae Sabha in whose activities he took a keen interest and devoted much time and energy for over 35 years, he was vice-president of the Iran League, and served on the managing committee of the Indo-Iranian Cultural Society and the Parsi Lying-in-Hospital. He was a trustee of the Boys' Town School in Nasik, The Avabai Pavri School, Joint Secretary of The All India Federation of Zoroastrian Anjumans and treasurer of the Cyrus the Great Celebrations Committee. He took an active interest in drama, writing and staging his own plays, the proceeds from which went to charity. He also wrote on religious topics, his book *The Essential Principles of Zoroas-*

trianism running into a second edition.

A native of Bhavnagar State, Mr. Ranina completed most of his formal education in Bombay. He started his legal career but returned to Bhavnagar to continue a family tradition of over 60 years of service to the state. He was appointed Chief Customs Officer and also held the position of Director of Commerce and Industry. He was President of the Bhavnagar Parsi Anjuman. Due to indifferent health he retired from state service after 16 years and joined Air-India, and Air India International since its inception.

After the liquidation formalities for the airline companies were completed in 1971, Ranina was asked to continue working, and attended office every week. It was on his way to office, while negotiating a turn, that his car was struck by a police van. Mr. Ranina, who was driving at the time, was removed to St. George's Hospital where he remained conscious till he breathed his last.

Hormasji Pherozshah Shroff, 62, Director & Chief Executive Officer (Operations), Tata Chemicals Ltd.; in a car accident near Mithapur while on company work. Mr. Shroff, who had served the company for over 34 years, held an M.Sc. degree from Bombay University and an M.S. degree in Chemical Engineering from The University of Wisconsin.

He was travelling from Mithapur to Jamnagar on the afternoon of November 1st along with Mr. D. G. Pujari, the company's Administrative Manager in Mithapur, and Shri Bhupatsinh a company chauffeur when the driver of an oncoming cement truck reportedly lost control of his vehicle due to a sudden axle breakdown and collided head-on with the Tata car. Shri Bhupatsinh, 52, was killed instantly, while Mr. Shroff and Mr. Pujari died in the Mithapur Hospital shortly thereafter. Mr. Shroff had celebrated his 62nd birthday just the day before.

To the members of all the above families, many of whom are known personally to members of the *Parsiana* staff, we extend our heartfelt condolences.

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