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Parsiana

February - March 1975

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Parsiana Cover designed by Manjula Padmanabhan





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editor's column

Just as we began to feel the community was going to the vultures, heartening news arrived. The Zoroastrian Society of Ontario reportedly proposes to hold a Zoroastrian World Conference in Toronto in 1977. A major contributor for the finances of the conference will be the Canadian Government, with member associations chipping in for the initial expenses. The objective of the conference as reported by the newsletter of the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York, "is to present our community, its achievements, its adaptability, its culture and its way of life to the North American continent and to the rest of the world; and to make Zoroastrians in North America more aware of themselves and the Zoroastrians in Iran, India and Pakistan more aware of us."

The proposal for the conference follows in the wake of a one-day symposium held by the Ontario Association in May which was attended by around 200 Zoroastrians. Prof. Jamshed Mavalwalla, president of the association emphasized that the talks and discussions were not expected to lead to any immediate action but should provide food for thought about the future of the community in North America. The New York newsletter noted several speakers "expressed the need for changes in the rules of acceptance into the religion, especially for the children of mixed marriages, since mixed marriages will be a fact of life for a considerable number of members of the community in the future..."

"The entire symposium proceedings have been tape recorded and the transcript and copies of the tape will be sent out to the

various Zoroastrian associations in the U.S. and Canada."

And from Australia we received a short write-up on the New South Wales Association by its Honorary Secretary Ernani Giamuzzi. Find the name puzzling? Read on: "Like a few others out here, I personally am not a Zoroastrian, but am of Italian descent and belong to the Roman Catholic Church. However, I have been more than fortunate in marrying a Zoroastrian. My wife was a Miss Aban Minocher Wadia of Calcutta. Because of her I am extremely proud to be associated with the Zoroastrian community as a whole. It certainly was an honour for me to be elected as Honorary Secretary of the Association..."

"Without exception, all the Zoroastrians living in New South Wales are well established in the field of commerce with most of them owning their own homes. They are also very well respected members of the Australian community."

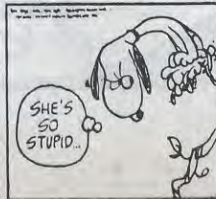
"The Australian Zoroastrian Association of New South Wales was started four years ago by a small number of resident Zoroastrians. Its objectives were to serve as a medium to hold the community together, to advance its interests, to promote better relations between the members of the community in Australia and the peoples of Australia, to be in a position to give information and guidance to newcomers of the community to Australia, to develop official approach avenues with a view to help future Zoroastrian migration to Australia, and to preserve cordial and fraternal relations with all other Zoroastrian Associations in the world. We are a non-profit and charitable organization, fully registered with the local authorities. To date, we

number approximately 60 families, 200 Zoroastrians in Sydney, which includes adults and children. I am unfortunately unable to comment on the number of Zoroastrians living in other states of Australia, but believe that there are approximately 20 families in Perth, and about 8 to 10 families in Melbourne. There are, to my knowledge, no other Zoroastrian Associations formed as yet in the other states of Australia but we in New South Wales hope to guide and help such formations in the near future..."

"While, unfortunately, we do not have an *agary* and a *das-turji*, we are a tightly knit group and all efforts are being made to keep alight the sacred flame in our hearts and homes and to teach our children to observe the teachings of *Ahura Mazda*. Owing to the lack of religious conveniences it is impossible to perform certain necessary ceremonies, like *Navjotes*, marriages and last rites. These necessitate that people travel back to their homelands, especially in the case of *Navjotes*. We can only hope that we will be fortunate to receive a priest in our midst sometime in the future."

Our appeal in the last issue earned us a lot of sympathy and advice which we passed on to our creditors. Hovering on the brink of economic bankruptcy (always being at a deficit morally) we decided the best thing to do would be to see a movie. And so while watching *Casablanca* in a semi-suicidal state of mind, brightened only by Ms Gandhi's ouster, imagine our joy on hearing one of the lead characters turn to Humphrey Bogart (Homi Boga) and say: "Everyone has a destiny for good or for evil. We have to make the choice." Straight from the *Gathas*. And so the message spreads.

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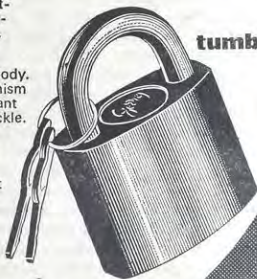
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"An Area of Darkness"

I am writing this in reference to the cover illustration of the January 1975 issue of *Parsiana*. I do not think it is in good taste. The cover picture often depicts the thoughts or habits or way of life of the illustrated. The caption says "Parsi Widow." Is it necessary that a Parsi widow should be living as in the illustration? It is the picture of poverty personified, plus starvation and misery with a capital M. As a Parsi, I take exception to it. There are rich and poor in all communities, and I am sure we do all we can to uplift the standards of the unfortunate of our community. The very sight of the picture makes one wonder if this is the lot of Parsi widows.

It is not necessary for a woman to be a widow to live in strained circumstances. A wife with an ailing husband, or one out of employment, with a string of children will, perforce, have to live uncomfortably. I am sorry that those responsible have been pleased to publish such a cover.

Ms Dilla J. Nalladaroo
Madras

As the cover was in reference to the article on Parsi widows of limited financial means residing in chawls exclusively meant for them, we did not feel it was necessary to further define "Parsi Widow" in the caption on the Contents page. If by this omission we have caused offence or misled readers, we apologize. Our intention was not to tarnish the community's image

but to draw people's attention to the plight of the widows in question and to note that if the trusts concerned worked in co-ordination, then without any additional resources being required, the widows' standard of living could be considerably improved.

Parsiana Art Editor Manjula Padmanabhan explains below the criteria used in arriving at the final composition: When doing a cover illustration, there are two considerations to keep in mind: it should be eye-catching, and it should tie in with the cover story. What struck us most about the widows' chawls was the conditions under which these bereaved women lived. We wanted to depict the squalid economic conditions in which they are forced to live. We felt that the cover should somehow convey the loneliness of the widows rather than simply their poverty or helplessness. We considered several ways of doing this, some based on an imaginary and symbolic representation, for example, of a woman with her family but with the man of the household conspicuously missing, or a concrete jungle of high-rise sophisticated apartments contrasted with a drawing of one of the modest buildings of the chawls. Eventually, however, we felt that the most accurate and piquant statement would be made by showing a realistic scene. The photograph we finally chose had a sort of classic quality, a timelessness which would make the observer stop and want to find out more about the subject because the picture communicated something beyond mere physical poverty or melancholy.

I have read your interesting article "An Area of Darkness" in the December-January 1975 issue of *Parsiana*. May I just correct one fact and that is that widow Mrs. Ratanbai Velati receives Rs. 30 per month from the Jam-e-Jamshed Charity Funds, Rs. 30 per month from the Parsi Panchayat Funds and Rs 10 from the Panday Fund. The first two stipends are arranged by us and we have also arranged for her free medical treatment at our Health Unit where the cataract of her left eye was remov-

ed free of charge. By the way we have very recently recommended to a charitable trust to give this lady a lump sum help of Rs 75. I have only written this letter in order that the records are kept straight otherwise your readers will be under an erroneous impression.

J. M. GANDEVIA

Liaison Committee for Organisation of Parsi Charities and Social Services.

Correspondent Thrity Keeka checked with Ms Velati who stated that she received monthly Rs. 30 from Jam-e-Jamshed charities and Rs. 20 from the Parsi Panchayat; Ms Velati noted the Panday Fund gave her Rs. 10 per month initially then increased it to Rs. 30 but the last payment was made on January 29 after which she has not received any money from them.

Godiwala Chawl

Godiwala Chawl was incorrectly named Hodiwala Chawl in our article "An Area of Darkness." *Parsiana* regrets the error.

Malignant Stereotype

I am one of your overseas subscribers, and read with great interest all the news from 'back home'. It seems to me, however, that too much attention is given to negative aspects without any real attempt made to deal constructively

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with them. As an example, I cite your November 1974 issue in which your contributing authors and readers invariably portray Parsi boys as indolent, hedonistic, and unambitious. As a young Parsi male myself, I must take exception to this developing and malignant stereotype.

Of all my Parsi friends and relatives, and I can think of at least two dozen right off the bat, only one could possibly be considered an under-achiever, and even he is doing much better than the average Indian of the same age group. The rest are all aggressive, ambitious, talented and successful young men; all are in their 20s. The list includes two medical doctors, eight Ph.D.s (one of whom is also a *mobed*), two entrepreneurs, and numerous junior management executives in the airline, newspaper, shipping, automobile, and chemical industries. Contrary to your stereotype, not one of them works in a bank all except one have at least a Bachelor's degree, and most of them over 25 are married.

Am I to understand that my 27 years of association and experience with Parsis is not representative of the true situation? I can hardly accept that point of view in the light of my own experience. Let me make it clear that I do not come from a rich family, and neither do most of my friends. We all grew up in Santacruz, Byculla, Matunga and Dadar, which are traditional middle class areas preferred by Parsis in Bombay.

I do not say that all young Parsi men are hard-working and successful. All I say is that the entire barrel should not be condemned because of a few bad apples. Let us be constructive; instead of lamenting bygone glory, let us recognise reality, and build on our community's strengths while correcting its weaknesses.

JIMMY D. KUMANA
Ohio, U.S.A.

Togetherness

I found the magazine very interesting and informative, and I am sure that if it achieves a wider circulation it will fulfill a longstanding need. Our community needs something like this to emphasize the feeling of belonging to a common clan; to keep the members of the community informed of the

important current events and developments in our society; and to give one and all a platform to voice their individual opinions publicly about pertinent matters in the community.

This magazine was of special interest to me because I am deeply interested in our community and its future, which seems very dim at present, due to several reasons. But since one and all seem to realize this now, I take it as a good sign which should goad the younger generation into doing something about it! I presume *Parsiiana* is the intellectual outcome of a similar feeling.

With reference to the letter by Ms Jungalwalla, we are all aware that most Parsee families are sadly ignorant of the basic philosophies and concepts of our religion and are, therefore, unable to even attempt to educate their children about the same. Would it not fulfill an important need if you included a page by one of our Zoroastrian scholars (a modern and broad-minded one), on interesting and lively subjects concerning our religion? This will not detract from the popularity of the magazine, as some may fear; but, if sensibly directed, would be a welcome feature, more for the youth. You could give it a try, also keeping in mind that not only an emphasis on a common social heritage, but also on the religious unity (philosophical values rather than ritualistic concepts) will help strengthen and bind the community, which, I presume is what your magazine is aiming at. If I may say so, it would also help to soften those critics of *Parsiiana* who feel your magazine supports the 'Young Turks' of the community.

MS ZAREEN LAM
Poona.

Prayermates

As late as the 1920s there were Parsi ladies who performed religious ceremonies in their own homes, with the help of a *mobed*. My own *mamaji*, Goolbai Hormusjee Vakeel, was one such. I remember very vividly being allowed to sit and watch her perform a *jashan* with the help of a priest. My eldest *masi*, Shirinbai Behramji Karaka, was remarkable in that she knew by heart the 72 chapters of the *yasna*. She was a

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holy terror to all our *mobeds* who did not dare to skip a passage if she was present, or else they were hauled over the coals for it!

It surprised me to note the reaction of Shrivastav Vakil who dismissed as "pure nonsense" Dr. Homi Bana's suggestion that Parsi women, after the menopause, should be allowed to perform religious ceremonies. Actually, Dr. Bana was being extremely orthodox when he made that remark, for in ancient Iran, and in India in the early days of the Parsi settlers here, it was a common practice for Zoroastrian women to perform certain religious ceremonies in their own homes.

But alas, which Parsi lady today is capable of performing any ceremony of our religion in her own home? Even with my background, I plead guilty of not knowing the 72 chapters of the *yasna* by heart, nor am I capable of performing a *jashan* in the home.

It might be a very good thing to revive the practice of parents performing religious ceremonies in the home. Not only would the parents know the meaning of the ceremony, but the children themselves would feel excited and learn the significance of what was taking place before their eyes. There would not then be the scorn and contempt for our ceremonies which we find today.

It would also be a very good thing to make Navjote-age children chant their prayers, slowly and clearly with the chant rhythm flowing with its own beauty. I remember learning some of our ancient chants from Dr. Jivanji Modi who performed my navjote. It took him a full half-hour just to recite the *kusti* prayers. But what an experience for the listeners! Even as children, we would stop shouting and playing as soon as those sonorous notes reached our ears. We would tiptoe silently away, each finding a quiet corner just to sit and listen to the chanting.

I am happy to say that in our Dar-i-Meher at Delhi, our priest, Darius Bagli, still chants with great expression and great beauty, all our prayers at any ceremony he is asked to perform.

MS PILOO JUNGALWALLA
New Delhi





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THE LADY AND THE LETTER

The Federation of the Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India is an obscure institution with a checkered history. The brainchild of the Second World Zoroastrian Conference held in 1964, the Federation was conceived to initiate a dialogue between the various Anjumans in India and to tackle the numerous problems facing the community.

Many feel it has been unsuccessful in both. Though the constitution requires the Executive Council of the Federation to meet a minimum of once in three months, almost a year lapsed between the Council's January 1974 meeting and the January 1975 general body meeting. The apparent reason for the delay is the half-yearly journal of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman, *Dipanjali*, noted in its December issue was that "the President of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat, who is also the President of the Executive Council of the Federation, has not been able to find the time to fix a meeting of the Council." While the change in leadership from Nadir Mulla to Lady Hirabai Jehangir may explain some of the delay, it does not fully account for the step-motherly treatment the Federation receives from the Bombay Panchayat.

At the next committee meeting held on April 7th in Bombay, which Lady Jehangir could not attend due to ill health, Shrivax D. Nargolwala, President of the Delhi Anjuman, presided. One of the items on the agenda pertained to a letter that Jamshed Dinsha Italia, acting President of the Hyderabad and Secunderabad Anjuman, wrote to the Federation's executive secretary, N. H. Vacha, concerning the death of Sheheryar Kaosji in Hyderabad on December 25. "I would like this question to be taken up at the next meetings," wrote Italia.

But on instructions from Lady Jehangir, the letter was not circulated as the matter was "controversial" (Clause 35: Discussion of Prejudicial matters). The letter would not have seen the light of day except Nargolwala ruled that "assuming the letter is regarded as controversial, it should have been

circulated to the members for information."

Italia's letter noted:

"The death of a Parsi Zoroastrian, Mr. Sheheryar Kaosji, occurred here at Hyderabad. This gentleman was the Administrative Officer and Assistant Secretary of our Anjuman. He was an educationist, scholar, orator, humanitarian and had served the Anjuman by giving yeoman service which few have so far given. He strongly believed in our Zoroastrian Religion and was well versed in it. The deceased had left a wish that he should be buried after death at the Parsi Burial Ground at Nizamabad about 110 miles from here. There is no Tower of Silence at Nizamabad. We have two Towers here at Hyderabad. While he was not against the Tower of Silence, he thought that those who wanted their bodies to be cremated or buried should not be deprived of the last rites as per Parsi Customs. Whenever any Parsi death occurred he, as an officer of the Anjuman, would go first to the Tower of Silence and have the place cleaned and accompany the body to the Tower of Silence and see that all the needful was done.

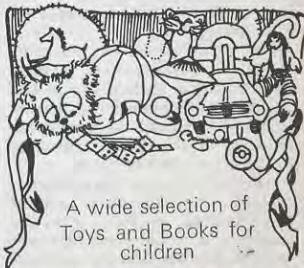
"The most unfortunate part was that the Mobed Sahibs here refused to perform the *Ghesarni* and offer the four days prayers for this gentleman after his death though they were willing to perform all the other ceremonies and prayers after the four days. This has led to a great deal of ill-feeling amongst certain sections of our community, specially the youth. The reason given by the Mobed Sahibs for not performing the main four days prayers and *Ghesarni* was that under their terms of agreement with the Iranshah Authorities at Udwada, they were forbidden to offer four days prayers for those who opt to be buried or cremated at places where there are Towers of Silence.

"One does not find fault with the Mobed Sahibs as they may have certain obligations, but one fails to understand the logic of the whole procedure. If the Mobed Sahibs are willing to perform all prayers and conduct ceremonies after the first four days, then why not for

the first four days? I take it that the Federation and Parsi Panchayat have placed no such restrictions on this issue, if they have, then the time has come for the Federation and the Parsi Panchayat to take a second look. If we do not do so we will be driving away our young from our community. As it is, it is difficult to sustain the interest of the Youth of our Community in our religion and various orthodox customs. In the modern changing world we the elders have to change our orthodox views without in any way jeopardising the tenets of our powerful religion.

"I, therefore, would like the Federation to consider the issues involved at the next meeting and pass such resolution as thought fit for the benefit of those who are for the changing times but believe sincerely in our religion. I, for one, personally see no reason why the benefit of the last rites should not be given to those who prefer to be buried or cremated as long as these persons have maintained the Zoroastrian Religion throughout their lives. Let us not drive away our youth from our religion. Let us find ways and means to meet them half way."

According to the minutes of the meeting, "Nargolwala stated that



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when a priest is employed by a particular Anjuman or Trust, that Anjuman or Trust has control over that priest in terms of the contract made with him, and hence the Federation should not interfere. As for the question of cremation, Nargolwala stated it was controversial and he ruled that it not be discussed as its discussion would be prejudicial to the interest of the Parsi Zoroastrian community.

"Nargolwala further stated that while burial was a person's right, a priest had also the right to perform the ceremony. The practice varied; Nargolwala gave the instance of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman, where burial was the practice and all ceremonies were performed by the priests.

"After a lengthy discussion it was decided that as each Anjuman was an autonomous body and as it entered into a contract when employing a priest, the matter was for each Anjuman to decide in consultation with its priests, and that the Federation need not interfere."

In other matters taken up, Dadi Mistry of Delhi gave a resume of his scheme to aid "knowledgeable and capable Parsi Zoroastrian entrepreneurs to start businesses outside the limits of the big cities." Nargolwala noted that Nadir Mulla had drawn up a trust deed, non-communal in nature, through which money could be gifted for the purpose of helping entrepreneurs. The trust deed is to be registered in New Delhi.

The proposal for a non-communal, co-operative store in New Delhi has been shelved due to the oil-crisis. Nargolwala noted that as people were spread out over great distances in the capital, travelling to the store would be costly.

A team of eminent lawyers headed by P. P. Khambata is to form a committee to look into the amendments to the Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, and the adoption laws.

Judging from the above items, it is apparent there is much the Federation can do. But as Dipanjali notes in regard to the earlier meetings, "not much progress has been made... this is a great pity. We are all living in difficult times. It is up to us to look after our own interests. The efforts of the leaders of our community should, there-

Please turn to page 44, col. 1

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THE ATTACK ON THE KAISER

"On the 10th of April at about 10.15 a.m. five or six Parsi *goondas* charged into my office and surrounded my desk. One of them, a hefty fellow, caught me by the collar and said *Sala mugo nai rese to taru mote avelu samajje* (Swine, if you don't shut up consider yourself dead). They dealt me some blows and I raised a cry for help. The others working in the press rushed to my assistance and the intruders fled."

The attack on Jal Heerjibehddhin, Editor of the 93-year-old *Kaiser-e-Hind* weekly, followed a series of unfavourable articles the journal had carried on the mystic leader Minocher Pundole and his group. Heerjibehddhin, who runs the Gujarati-English tabloid along with his brother Soli, alleged that Pundole had accepted funds from the public without having accounted for the money.

In a long letter to the Parsi Panchayat Chairwoman Lady Hirabai Jehangir, the Editor complained about the manhandling. The 83-year-old Chairwoman has been unable to attend the recent fortnightly

Trustees' meetings due to ill-health, but on her return to office a resolution condemning the attack is expected to be passed.

The letter, which was published in the April 20 issue of the weekly, notes that the Pundolites are collecting funds to construct an *adaran* in Udwarda. Although the crumbling Parsi Mecca already houses an *atash-behram* in which burns the revered *Iranshah*, and an *agjary*, the Pundolites claim the *atash-behram* must be complemented with an *adaran*, an associate structure in which a fire burns (see *Parsiana* Sept. issue: Udwarda: The King and the Vazir). Ms Nelie Noble, a Trustee of the Parsi Panchayat, is a devotee of Pundole and was reportedly present at the *Adaran's* foundation laying ceremony.

"The pertinent question," says the *Kaiser*, "is whether an unrecognised group of persons, in which a Trustee of the Parsi Panchayat takes an active interest, can collect donations from ignorant and unwary members of the community without giving proper receipts and

without registering the Trust? It would certainly reflect on the integrity of the premier Institution... the guardian of the community."

The *Kaiser* pressed its attack in the issue of April 27 with another article under the headline: Pundole Group In Hot Legal Soup. "Our inquiries have revealed," said the article, "that Mr. Pundole has paid no taxes whatsoever on all offerings received by him for all these years in Bombay from devoted disciples which amount, according to our information, runs into six figures and the Income-Tax authorities should call upon him to file a Return and on his failure to do so, to make an assessment against him."

"It is a very well known fact that the practice of religion amounts to a vocation. If, therefore, the position as expounded by Mr. Pundole and his disciples... if taken as the correct factual position... Mr. Pundole is under obligation to pay income-tax on all the amounts of the gross offerings made by his disciples and followers, and to make and maintain proper books of account for the same." Pundole, 67, is a declared insolvent.

In reply to an inquiry by the Assistant Charity Commissioner of Surat in 1971 titled "Funds for new Parsi *Agjary*", Pundolites Kaikobad Hormusji Sidhwa and Behram Hormusji Bharda noted "no public trust has been created so far and it is not the intention of any of the parties to create any public trust..."

The *Kaiser* noted that: "It is further stated in the said reply that Sidhwa has made a private gift of a spare plot of land belonging to him to Pundole since he considers Pundole to be his religious leader (Guru). It is further stated in the said reply that it is a private deed of gift made between the two individuals with which the members of the public are in no way concerned and is an unconditional gift."

"It is further stated that a group of about 25 well-placed and substantial Parsi gentlemen in Bombay have got together and contributed a fund for establishing a



Heerjibehddhin: A pertinent question (Photo by Manjula Padmanabhan)

Please turn to page 44, col. 2



HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE

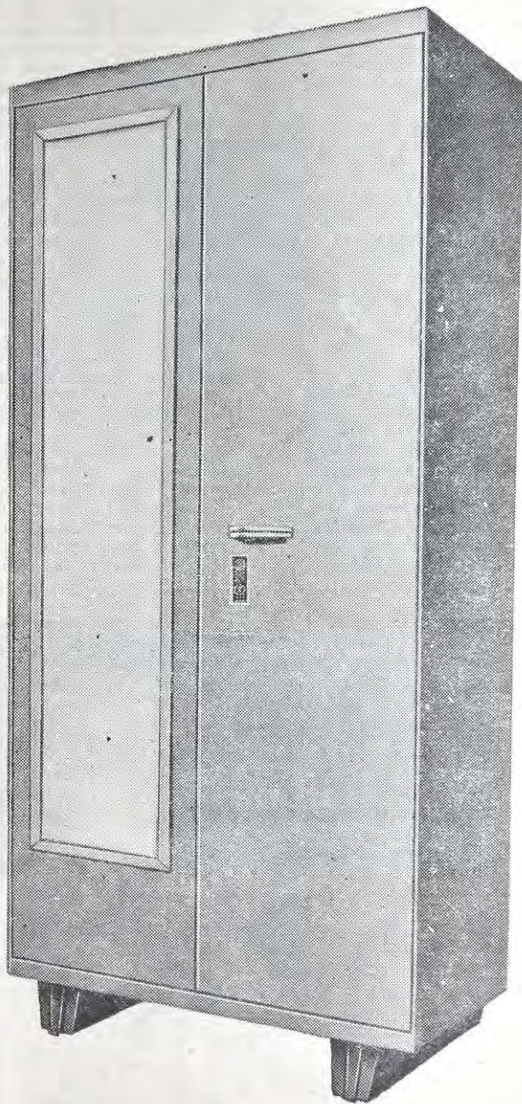
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BLUEPRINT FOR PLANNING

by Pervin Mahoney



Purshotandas Thakurdas Hostel (Photo by Cyrus Dordi)

The dearth of housing in large cities is the source of much lament. But while most people are content to just state the problem, the tenacious members of the Women Graduates Union set about constructing a hostel for working women. For 15 years they battled numerous obstacles, successfully fought a lengthy law suit, raised funds, and withstood the ravages of time and red tape to make the Purshotandas Thakurdas Hostel for Working Women a reality last November. Situated in Bombay's residential south zone, the brand-new seven-storeyed glass and concrete structure built at a cost of 30 lakhs houses 94 women. While the figure is insignificant in relation to the thousands of men and women who go from pillar to post in search of accommodation, there is no reason why the WGU ven-

ture should not serve as a model to others, especially our Parsi trusts who have large assets that are lying fallow and serve no one.

"A little property with a garden, that was all we had envisaged," mused Ms Dolly Masani, chairwoman of the WGU hostel committee. That was how the organization of graduate women first embarked on their scheme 15 years ago. "At the annual general meeting of WGU, a senior member proposed that, being an educational body, we should start a really good school. But Mrs. Avabai Wadia pointed out the need for a women's hostel. After all, whether we have bad schools or good schools, at least we have schools, but we have hardly any hostels."

Several newspapers also conducted surveys arriving at the same conclusion. Finally both the

Central and Maharashtra governments started a scheme whereby grants were to be given to voluntary agencies to build hostels.

"For a whole year we looked for a suitable building, but all our efforts proved fruitless because we would not give money below the table," Ms Masani recalled. "Eventually we appealed to the Government of Maharashtra to acquire a property under this scheme, and they did so from the Port Trust, with WGU paying compensation."

But with the land WGU also acquired a sea of troubles. Their right to the land was disputed by a third party, and the dispute dragged on for an unbelievable ten years. Fortunately, civic-minded lawyers provided free counsel—"otherwise we would have had to give up," noted Ms Masani. Litigation began in the Criminal Court, progressed through the City Civil Court and the High Court till it reached the Supreme Court. In the last three courts the Government of Maharashtra was made principal defendant, and WGU a party to the suit. Looking weary at the mere memory, Ms Masani, who has a painful spine ailment that often completely incapacitates her, recalled, "Only the fact that WGU members would just not allow themselves to be browbeaten into submission sustained us through this long-drawn-out agony."

"Then came the last straw. The property had a house which, with some alterations, would have suited us very well. With repairs, the project would not have cost more than three lakhs. But in order to dissuade and frighten WGU with the magnitude of the task, the owner demolished the building. We were forced to undertake the construction of a new structure."

In 1970 litigation ended. Taking a deep breath WGU began fundraising. Not only had ten years lapsed, but also the original government scheme. So funds had to be sought elsewhere. "We had to persuade the government that unless they helped us, the public would not come forward with large donations. 'Now that we've got the land, you can't let us down,' we argued. Even during the two

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drought years, the government made an exception and granted us two lakhs," said Ms Masani, who has found that the Indian public responds more readily to emotional causes than to social ones. Its heart and purse-strings are moved by causes such as the blind or polio victims, but "you have to sit and convince people that social distress can be as painful as the physical. I even told some donors about my own handicap, saying that in spite of it I considered myself more fortunate, because I don't have to worry about security or shelter."

The two architects of the hostel are both young WGU members—Ms Roshan Wadia and Ms Ranjini Chinnappa of Tata Consulting Engineers (TCE). The feminine touch shows in the thoughtful attention to detail—each room has a washbasin, a large steel cupboard to accommodate an extensive wardrobe and a full-length mirror for perfect sari-draping. TCE along with the Tata Electric Companies carried out as honorary work the design of the hostel and



Dolly Masani "long drawn-out agony"

the supervision of its construction.

The hostel's residents are charged according to their income; fees range between Rs. 250-450 (including breakfast and dinner), although the minimum rate requires subsidising. The hostel is cosmopolitan and has a fairly

liberal atmosphere. It allows residents to vote on house rules and treats them as responsible adults, not prisoners.

After the speeches and the ovations, the congratulations and the eats, when guests were taken to look round the hostel after Pratibha Patil, Maharashtra's Minister for Social Welfare, had declared it open, Ms Masani sat exhausted in a corner of the large hall. She reminisced, "One thing that strikes me nowadays is that people are very conscious of their rights but not of their duties." Over the years we have had scores of inquiries asking when the hostel would be ready, but no one saying, 'Can we be of any help?' For instance, we had a brick fund: a one-rupee coupon bought a brick. There was no response. People want things done for them; they don't raise a finger to help themselves.

"Sometimes I think voluntary work will die out. Today, belonging to as many committees as possible has become a matter of (Continued on page 44, col. 2)



Below is the abridged text of the lecture 'Recent Parsi History' delivered by John Hinnells of the Department of Comparative Religion at Manchester University, under the auspices of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute earlier this year. Hinnells has made two visits to India in the past two years to gather information for a proposed book on the Zoroastrian religion and the Parsi community. Parsiana carried a full length interview with him in the December 1973 issue.

The first part of his talk deals with the role of the Parsis in India before the arrival of the British and the second with the problems confronting the community and the possible solutions.

I have heard very many people in Bombay say that it was only with the arrival of the British that the Parsis came to power, and that it was with Independence and the departure of the British that the fortunes of the Parsis began to decline. I wish to dispute both parts of this belief.

Contrary to popular opinion, the community did not merely exist but actually flourished prior to British rule. The *Qissah-i Sanjan* relates the story of the arrival of the Parsis in India. This text embodies older traditions but it may be taken as expressing the attitude of Parsis to India in the year it was written—1600 A.C. It states that the Parsis settled in Gujarat because it was God's will and His answer to their prayers. The faithful Zoroastrians in Iran who wished to practise their religion and escape Arab persecution set sail in frail boats to find a new land of religious freedom. While at sea a storm blew up and they

were in great danger, so, the *Qissah-i Sanjan* relates, they offered prayers to God. In the words of the text they prayed:

"Deliver us from this strait and keep us sound. We are resigned to everything that comes from the Lord, for save Him, we possess no other friend.' By the blessing of the Fire of the glorious Bahman all of them luckily got over that trouble; their supplications were instantly heard and the Lord came to the rescue... Then providence so ordered it that all those people arrived near Sanjan."

Thus in 1600, when this text was written, the Parsis already looked on their arrival in India as something ordained by God, their settlement in this land as an answer to prayer.

Such an account would not have been written by an oppressed people, it would never have been presented as God's answer to their prayer if they were not happily settled here in India. Similarly the story of Meherji Rana's visit to the Emperor Akbar shows the secure and respected position held by the community. It may be that the Parsi accounts of this event have been glamourised, but an emperor would never have accepted at court—nor made grants of land—to the priest of a despised community.

The very first recorded contact between the British and the Parsis shows the Parsis already holding influential positions.

In 1660 the British were having great difficulty in starting trade in the Surat region because of local Muslim officials. It was a Parsi, Rustum Maneck Seth, who helped them. He pleaded with

the Emperor Aurangzeb for the British and obtained for them very valuable conditions. Only a person of repute, esteem and influence could have interceded in this way with an Emperor. Rustomji, had previously assisted the British in their dealings with ministers of state and became broker for the East India Company, a position which many Parsis later came to hold for many British firms.

We have several reports from travellers of the time as to the position and mentality of the Parsis. They are said to be a hard-working people, they drank liquor, but not to excess and were to be found in all manner of jobs save smith's work and other jobs which involved the use of fire, they had a reputation for hard bargaining at trade, but not for stealing. For helping the poor and not allowing their own to beg. Their faces are described as pale and generally fairer than the Europeans. The men had hook noses and long beards.

The travellers almost always refer to the same things—fire, work, monotheism—there is no impression of a community ill at ease with its neighbours. Ovington, for example, on his *Voyage to Surat*, 1689, writes, "They (the Parsis) own and Adore one Supreme Being, to whom, as he is the Original of all things, they dedicate the first Day of every month, in a solemn observance of his Worship. And enjoin, besides these, some others for the Celebration of public prayers. At their solemn Festivals, whither an hundred or two sometimes resort, in the Suburbs of the City, each man according to his Fancy and Ability, brings with him his Victuals, which is equally dis-

tributed, eaten in common by all that are present. For they show a firm Affection to all of their own Sentiments in Religion, assist the Poor, and are very ready to provide for the Sustenance and Comfort of such as want it. Their universal kindness, either in employing such as are Needy and able to work, or bestowing a seasonable bounteous charity to such as are infirm and miserable; leave no man destitute of Relief, nor suffer a Beggar in all their Tribe; ... and In their Callings they are very Industrious and diligent, and careful to train up their Children to Arts and Labour. They are the principal men at the Loom in all the Country, and most of all the Silks and Stuffs at Suratt, are made by their Hands."

We do not have any references to Parsi wealth at this period—but that, I think, is due to the fact we have so few sources. Can you imagine that a poor man could have interceded with Aurangzeb as Rustom Maneck Seth did?

We do have references to Parsi wealth much earlier in the period of British rule than is generally realized. James Forbes wrote a book in 1783 about his travels to Surat and said, "The most beautiful villas and gardens, at least those in the best order, no longer belong to Moghuls or Hindus, but to Parsis. They not only grow rich, but know how to enjoy the comforts and luxuries which money can bring." The point of these references is that it was not the period of British rule which made the Parsis powerful, but their own traditional values of hard work, honesty, and charity. So the foundations of later Parsi success were laid before the British rule. Obviously the golden period was under the British. The story of that success is so well known that I don't need to relate it, but a few examples will suffice.

Bombay grew because of the dockyard, a dockyard built, owned and run by Parsis. The main export of Bombay in the 19th century was textiles. In 1915 Parsis owned more mills than any other Indian community, and they supplied more than half the mill managers—there were more Parsis than Europeans managing mills. The Lion, or uncrowned king, of Bombay was

Pheroze Shah Mehta—a Parsi. The Parsis had a virtual monopoly of Indian trade with the East, they started journalism in Western India and began the trade union movement in the country. The only three Indians to become Members of Parliament at Westminster were all Parsis and three of the four Indian baronets were Parsis.

Last but by no means least, Parsi charity is famous the world over—charity given not only to Parsis but to people as far apart as earthquake victims in Japan and poor mill workers in my home town of Manchester.

Such a record for such a small community is, I think, unique, and it has been well documented by Eckehard Kulke in his book *The Parsis in India*, published in autumn 1974. Yet we all know this is not the end of the story. Today the community can still hold

tury 49 per cent of the total Parsi population of India lived in Bombay, in 1971 about 70 per cent lived in Bombay. The state of Parsis in the rural areas of Gujarat is such that more and more of them wish to migrate to this city to search for work. The reason is not difficult to see.

In 1954 and 1967 Shah and Mistry respectively undertook social surveys of these rural Parsis. They reported that 74 per cent of them have insufficient income to maintain a family, and that 66 per cent may be considered perennially starving. The poverty is such that most women, 55 per cent to be precise, never get married because they cannot afford to. Almost quarter of these rural families are dependent on relatives in Bombay for money to survive. As the position of the community in Bombay deteriorates, less money is sent to

It was not the departure of the British that brought about the community's decline—but the departure of Zoroastrian ideals.

its head up high—but its position does not compare with that of a hundred years ago. Why?

The Act of Independence has affected the community. What may be for the good of the whole country is not always to the good of a small section—and small is the word for this community. It now represents 0.016 per cent of the total Indian population. The nationalisation of such Parsi holdings as Air India and some banks obviously has taken away some of its wealth. Often when we blame others it is ourselves who are at fault—is this the case with recent Parsi history?

The first problem facing the community is obviously size. The Parsi community is rapidly decreasing. In the last 20 years it has been declining at the rate of 10 per cent per decade. The community was at its largest in 1941 when there were 114,890 Parsis in India. In 1971 there were only 91,266. Of this decreasing population a higher and higher percentage are centered in Bombay. At the turn of the cen-

Gujarat and the result is even more poverty.

When I visited Gujarat in January this year, I met an American professor, Ketayun Gould, a Parsi, who is undertaking research similar to Shah and Mistry, to see what has happened in the intervening period. She has not yet tabulated the findings of her house-to-house survey so it is not possible to give precise figures, but, she says, it is quite clear that the trends and problems identified in the 1950's and 1960's have intensified—that migration continues and that the condition of the Parsis in the rural areas is deteriorating. The future of the Parsi community, therefore, is clearly and unmistakably here in Bombay.

I do not need to spell out to you the problems of living in Bombay, but a few statistics may help to reinforce your impressions. In 30 years the population of Bombay has more than doubled. Taking the figures of only Bombay city, in 1931 it was 1,161,383, in 1961 it was 2,771,933. If one excludes the

suburbs and counts only the centre, which is what I did with the last set of figures, then Bombay has a density of population far higher even than that of the notorious Calcutta. Whereas Calcutta has 73,182 people per square mile, Bombay city has 105,839 people per square mile. Bombay also has a higher percentage of people living in hutment areas and more pavement dwellers.

You know better than I do what effect this has had on the cost of living in general and on housing in particular. This is one of the chief factors in the decrease of the Parsi population. With the community's traditionally high standards of living young Parsis have delayed marriage until they can provide themselves with a home of their own. The average age for a Parsi man to get married is now 33.5 years, whereas the average age for men throughout India is 24.78. Similarly Parsi women tend to get married older; their average marriage age is 28 while for women throughout India it is 19.45.

The result of delaying marriage is inevitable—fewer children are born. In 1901 for every 100 Parsi

women 33.5 children were born. In 1961 for every 100 Parsi women 21.1 children were born. This means not only a shrinking community, but also one with a higher ratio of older people. The average age of all Parsis in 1911—the earliest year for which I could get figures was 28.7. In 1961 it was 37. The average age of the community has, therefore, increased by one-third. As the average age of the total Indian population is only 24, you can see that this is a distinctly Parsi problem. In short, the migration to Bombay has resulted in a smaller and a more aged community. Obviously this is a vicious circle, and viewed in human terms it is inevitable that these tendencies will increase. The Parsis migrated to Bombay to seek their fortune. Ironically the overall wealth of the community has declined as the migration has continued, a decline due in part to increasing Hindu and Muslim competition for good jobs.

The state of Parsi wealth—or the lack of it—has been documented in Dr. Jal Bulsara's study of Bombay entitled *Patterns of Social Life in Metropolitan Areas*. The

fact of the matter is that it was not Independence and the withdrawal of the British which were the fundamental causes of the community's problems—but the migration to Bombay. That which once made the community so great has in the long run brought about its decline.

In a book published in 1947, Shapur Desai predicted these very trends. He made one mistake. What was then considered a pessimistic view of the community's future, in fact turned out to be optimistic. The decline in numbers occurred almost a decade earlier than he prophesied.

Problem number one, then, is the intense concentration of the community in one city which, because of that city's problems, has resulted in diminishing numbers, diminishing wealth and an increasing average age. As I have already said, this is a vicious circle, and viewed in human terms the problems will get greater and greater, quicker and quicker.

There is a second problem.

A major factor in the rise of the community in the 19th century was

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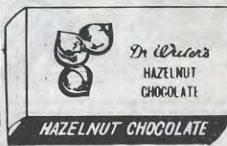
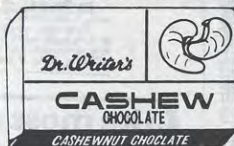
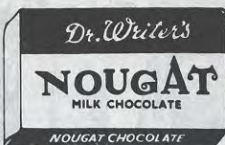
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 I mean, applying by stroke, and on reclining on easy chairs and
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the image may be exagger-
 ome truth in the picture.



THE PARSII GIRL OF THE PERIOD. No.-8

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 I mean, applying by stroke, and on reclining on easy chairs and
 on cushions, and only to superintend, I'll rather stay at home!



PARSI BANOO'S PATETI WISH.

"May the spirit that animated these enlightened and illustrious pioneers of Parsi Charity, Parsee Philanthropy, Parsee Industry, Parsee Education, and Parsee Public Spirit, descend on me and mine, running from generation to generation and raising the Parsee name high and higher in the scale of nations!"

पार्सी बानू का पटैती वीश.

"मैं सोचता हूँ कि जो आत्मा इन प्रकाशित और प्रसिद्ध पार्सी दान, पार्सी फिलान्थ्रॉपी, पार्सी उद्योग, पार्सी शिक्षा, और पार्सी सार्वजनिक आत्मा के आगे, मेरे और मेरे परिवार पर, पीढ़ी से पीढ़ी तक, चलती रहे और पार्सी नाम को उच्च और उच्चतर नस्ल में उठावे!"

(Top left)

Amy— They want a lady Superintendent for a work class for poor Parsi women. Shall I apply for the post, Sol dear?

Solee— A work class implies work, and if you go there will be hardly any time to waste on hair-doing by ayahs, and on reclining on easy chairs and reposing on soft cushions. It means a hard day's stiff job.

Amy— Does it? I thought a superintendent has only to superintend. I'll rather stay at home!

PARSI BANOO'S PATETI WISH (Above)

"May the spirit that animated these enlightened and illustrious pioneers of Parsi Charity, Parsee Philanthropy, Parsee Industry, Parsee Education and Parsee Public Spirit, descend on me and mine, running from generation to generation and raising the Parsee name higher and higher in the scale of nations!"

its social mobility. Hindus were prevented from mixing with others and changing jobs because of caste restrictions. For the same reason Hindus and Muslims were slow to make use of the opportunities offered by Western education. The Parsis were very different. They were prepared to change with the times, to take any and every opportunity open to them, above all in education. By 1931 84 per cent of the Parsi population was literate, a proportion far in

advance of any other community. With the traditional Zoroastrian love for learning they leapt at the opportunities for all forms of higher education and thereby put themselves in an unrivalled position to take the top jobs.

But once again, ironically, that which made the community so powerful was responsible for its present problems. In taking to Western education, the community became westernized. Although the Inde-

(Please turn to page 39)

ARE PARISIS DYING OUT?

Interviews by
**Feroza Paymaster
and Pervin Mahoney**

From the villages and towns of Gujarat, to the bustling metropolis of Bombay the writing is on the walls. The community that once fled Persia to survive is slowly dying out. In 1961, the Government of India Census figures placed the numerical strength of the Parsis at 100,772. Ten years later the census figures were down to 91,122, a drop of around one per cent a year.

The declining birth rate, the preponderance of elderly people, the tendency towards migration, late marriages, and smaller families are all indications that the trend will continue. The root cause of the fall has been a failure of the community to adapt to changing times. Reforms are non-existent. Parsi institutions have proved unable to cope with the community's problems and Parsis themselves are generally indifferent.

But by and large the community is aware of its decreasing numbers. That consciousness may be the first step in the right direction.



Rati Bhabha, 18, Student, St. Xavier's College

"Of course. It's discussed at home, with friends, in most households, because older Parsis are concerned that there won't be any Parsis left! The younger generation don't consider it an earth-shaking calamity because they aren't so communal-minded."

Instancing late marriages and the ban on conversion as factors contributing to dwindling numbers, Rati adds, "Parsis have less children because they marry older, while a Hindu woman has to be married off by 20 or she's considered on the shelf."

"So far, Parsis had tremendous religious faith. The temptation of marrying out was shunned; now parents accept it if it occurs."

"Also a lot of Parsis did not emigrate in the past. They were bound to Bombay. If your father was a cashier you were groomed to be a cashier and fill his place. But emigration isn't a reason for dying out; those who leave for Iran and the UK have the freedom to practise their religions and form Zoroastrian Associations."

"It's important that we survive, because we have given a lot to India, and because we stress ethical values. The older generation feel that the community will never die. All through history it has been said that we would die out, but we have only lessened. Although I feel the death-rate will outnumber the birth-rate, I wouldn't bet on it: Parsis have terrific staying power."

Noshir Medhora, 45, Junior Engineer, Bombay Municipal Corporation



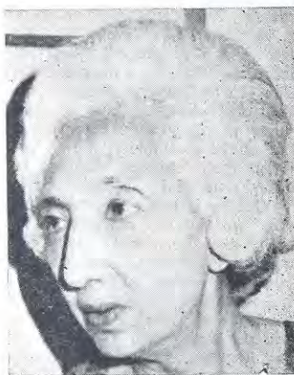
"The census figures say that the community is dying out. Ten years ago the population of an area in District Surat was 64 families. Now there are only 20. Of course, this is also caused by migration to cities, and emigration.

"Nowadays a man has to think twice before he gets married," says Medhora. "The average marriage age of Parsis is over 30—in my own case too. Women should adjust to spending less; that would be a big improvement."

Medhora believes that the question of whether the community will survive will never arise because "our religion and culture can be maintained even if we are only 20,000. Quality is more important than quantity; our intelligence and reli-

gious knowledge mustn't decline. We survived so long because Parsis had a monopoly in certain trades, and the income from these was enough to support a family. Since 1947 incomes have gone down. Most Parsis have changed from business to service. Many of our boys have intelligence but no family background which encourages them to go in for higher education. The Parsi Panchayat should take up the issue seriously. They could provide subsidized housing and free education of a high quality, so that after SSC talented Parsi boys don't join a bank or the municipality or the LIC in jobs where their salary will never go beyond a thousand rupees at retirement."

Piraja Narielwala, 64, Embroidery Designer



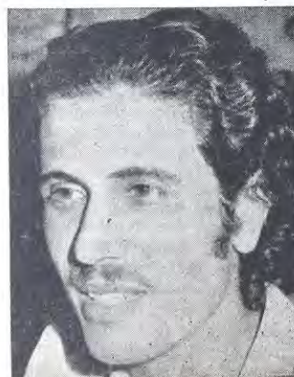
"How do we know, except by studying the census figures? Living in Bombay, the centre of the community, we seem to be more or less static. Of course, Parsi couples do restrict the size of their families for economic reasons. Strangely enough, lower-income couples seem to have larger families than higher-income ones, perhaps because our charities help them. Another reason why numbers may be declining is that so many Parsis have moved out of India.

"It's important that we survive because we haven't done badly as a community; we've provided many figures of worldwide eminence, in

spite of having a population of only about a lakh. If our numbers are dwindling, we should take in the children of Parsi mothers who have married non-Parsis. This would bring in an influx of nice fresh blood, though most Parsis might roar at the idea."

Recalling that when Parsis landed in India they promised the King that they would not seek converts, Narielwala noted that our survival speaks particularly well for the community "because we have never asked for any safeguards, prerogatives or privileges. So confident are we as a community."

Rohinton Irani, 28, Partner, Brighton Restaurant



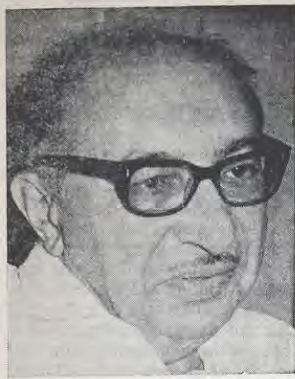
"Certainly. There are fewer Parsis to be seen in Bombay. I've also read about the problem somewhere, two years ago. Our death-rate is higher than our birth-rate. I give the community another 100 or 150 years.

"It's high time we diagnosed the reasons for this decline. There is a one-way traffic out of the community: girls marry out and even change to other religions, while we don't accept converts. Couples get engaged but don't marry for five or six years because they feel they don't have all the amenities, like houses, and *ayahs*.

"If Parsis can't survive in India, they can't survive anywhere else," says Rohinton, who feels the com-

munity should continue to exist because "what our religion teaches us is among the best."

"Our economic situation should be improved. We should encourage the young to go into business, and help them to get houses. After all, so many Parsis still live in large flats. They should be asked to give rooms to couples who want to get married. If we do away with pomp and unnecessary spending at weddings, the poor won't feel they are poor and will be encouraged to marry early. So our population will grow—and if the quantity is greater, the chances of good quality will also be greater. The two go hand in hand."



Dhunjishaw Sethna, 54, Chartered Architect, P. Kudianavala Associates

"It's obvious. The annual reports of the Parsi Panchayat show that our death-rate outstrips our birth-rate. Inter-marriages aggravate the situation because only the children of Parsi men can become Parsis. Nowadays the younger generation wants a free life, and the economic situation here makes it difficult to maintain a family. So even couples who have married young don't have children for five or six years—and after that they might not be able to have children. The brain drain is another reason for the drop in numbers."

Sethna does not think that any specific remedy will reverse the trend of decreasing numbers. "We should go along as we are. If we accept converts, only the poorer classes will join, to take advantage of our charitable funds, because basically everyone respects his own religion. I don't go for quantity but for quality."

"The community should continue to exist, because ours is the most ancient religion. It might take centuries for us to diminish to any major extent, and the world too might not survive. We won't ever be wiped off the face of the earth."



Aban Kamboj, 25, Stenographer, Universal Ferro and Allied Chemicals

"Yes, I think so. Parsis marry late and have very few children—hardly one or two. You can see 40-year-olds, or even older people, still not getting married. I don't understand why. Some people mention housing or money problems; others say they are too old; and boys say either that girls are not hardworking or that they work in offices and then dominate their husbands at home. Both boys and girls say, I earn too little; I can't get married. But people over 25 should get married. Of course, housing is a problem, but we do have the advantage of having colonies."

Citing intermarriage as a further

reason for dwindling numbers, Aban remarked, "We must have fresh blood to prevent defects of inbreeding. Parsis are too orthodox; they don't allow youngsters to mix with other communities. So some young people go abroad and marry out of the community; if they are girls, their children cannot be brought up as Parsis."

"Quality is more important than size; we should be hardworking, and not too orthodox. It is our religion, which on the whole is the best, that has made us survive so far; if we disappeared, our religion would be abolished. I am doubtful whether Parsis will exist forever. Say for another hundred years?"



Firdausj Nariman, 22, M.A. Student

"I don't know. But I gather they are from an article in the *Economic and Political Weekly*. We'll probably be around for another century. Compare us with other communities and you see our numerical weakness."

"Parsis don't marry for economic reasons. If you are getting fond of a high standard of living, you have high expectancies, and tend to ask what sort of future you can give your kids. Our level of education and liberal ideas is high. Other communities have arranged marriages, otherwise maybe they wouldn't get married either! Our high divorce-rate also cuts down the birth-rate. Sometimes I feel Parsi men and women just don't gel on the same wave-length."

Firdaus thinks that the community has survived so far because "life was slow in the past. We didn't have much competition and got used to the idea of being on top. Our survival doesn't matter from the national point of view; of late we have not contributed much. What good is our religion to anyone but ourselves? Religion should benefit everyone."

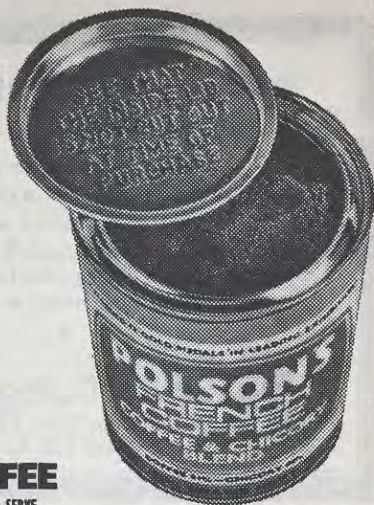
"The size of a community is not important. After all people have sometimes been bribed into conversion, which leads to the degeneration of a religion. That could happen to Parsis too. But we should at least open the community to the children and spouses of inter-marriage."

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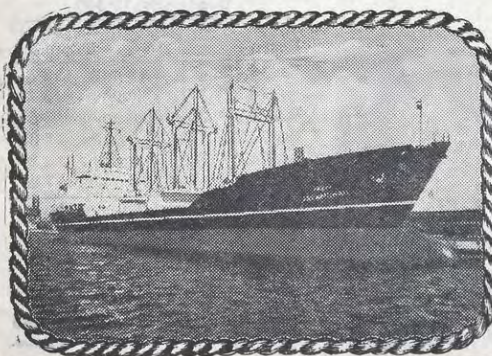
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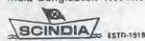
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A-51

comment: PARSIS & MENTAL HEALTH

by F. Mehta

(Ms Mehta is the Executive Vice-President of the Indian Council for Mental Hygiene.)

Many people assume Parsis to have a greater incidence of mental illnesses than the other Indian communities. Some Parsi youths also share this view. I have also heard two or three professional Parsi women, estimable and capable in their fields, proclaim from public platforms that Parsis are more mentally disturbed than the other communities. Even the noted psychiatrist, late Dr. J. C. Marfatia, pointed out in his paper "Parsis and Mental Health" (published in the B. D. Petit Parsi General Hospital Diamond Jubilee Souvenir) that a result of a survey taken of his patients showed that Parsis had a higher percentage of neurotic troubles, though as far as insanities are concerned other communities show a higher incidence.

But while critics focus on our negative aspects they should not forget the compensating pluses in the community's favour. We have contributed to India's welfare due to our cosmopolitan outlook, drive and exceptionally high incidence of talents, percentage-wise.

Our cosmopolitan outlook is exemplified in the percentage of literacy in our community, our non-communal charities and our relative lack of parochialism.

The percentage of literacy for Parsis is about ninety per cent, whereas for the whole of India it is about thirty per cent. Most non-Parsi charities are sectarian, whereas Parsi youths do not get admission into many Technical Institutes endowed by Parsis. I have heard self-made Parsi magnates announce to young Parsi men looking for jobs that they are Indians first and Parsis afterwards. Thus frequently a department is filled with members of other communities as most non-Parsi bosses do not share the same non-communal sentiment as many Parsis do.

A strange sequel is that when large numbers of Parsis do not

find well-paid jobs, partly due also to the wish not to slog specially for low remuneration, Parsi girls marry out of the community.

India, some people say, is full of corruption and some Parsis are corrupt too; but because of our boldness many of us do not have to be as sly or apathetic as those who feel bullied by Fate do. Religious fatalism breeds in many communities, bringing about the *chalta hai hota hai* attitude. In the scriptures of the world it is prescribed: "Honour thy Parents." In India the holy books write "Thou shalt honour and obey thy parents." This makes many people resistant to all change. Parsis, however, are usually an exception here; we are the revolutionaries against tradition, more adaptable to new ways, less apathetic and more questioning. Some of us are too aggressive, perhaps we are too adaptable, not digging our roots sufficiently deep.

Katherine Mayo wrote Bombay women in general gave the lead to Indian women, and I think Parsi women gave the lead under Dadabhai Naoroji to the Bombay women. Many Parsi women and men in the role of parents and spouses are militant—too militant, I am afraid.

The feeling of inadequacy inculcated by the militancy of parents in early life can, like too much indulgence, also lead later to a reactionary arrogance. If Parsis show a higher incidence of certain physical diseases it may be because they are made to feel inadequate; even resistance to infectious diseases can go down due to emotional imbalances. Dr. Minor Mody once in my presence asked a patient, who had contracted herpes, whether he had recently felt very worried and troubled. The patient did have at that time a bout of business troubles. Dr. Mody explained that infections are to be found everywhere in the air, but whether we contract them or not depends upon our bodily and mental states which are partly maintained according to emotional statics.

Late marriage is one cause of a higher incidence of mental illness. But marriages depend on the socio-economic climate which originates in psychological conditions. Psychological revolutions have to precede economic revolutions. If we are a richer community it may be because of our enterprise. Dr. Marfatia also emphasized that the incidence of depression is high among Parsis. If Parsis as a group are richer than other communities as a whole and show more depression, it is all due to our psychological make-up; yet a high incidence of talentness grows in such an atmosphere.

Dr. Marfatia indeed lets forth a very sound warning when he relates the high incidence of senile dementia to the early conditions prevailing in childhood experiences. Perhaps due to our being a marginal community, Parsi mothers are too ambitious and with the wish that the family survives, the mother expects too much at too early an age of her off-spring. She then aggressively lays down the law. She is also beset by the East-West conflict—whether to follow eastern modes or copy the western patterns of living. Attendant on the high incidence of complete emotional intolerance of what is considered 'bad' including the foibles of other communities, there is also the urge to achieve much. *Time* magazine wrote in its 1st April 1974 number "Indian Parsis number only about 100,000 worldwide, 65,000 of them are concentrated in Bombay. They are an uncommonly talented community. Parsis started off 12 of India's major modern industries, others helped lead India's independence struggle." But we have to pay a price by way of emotional exaggerations.

If in the orchestra of Indian life we are to survive and contribute to India's weal, we have to be allowed our eccentricities, and yet face and lessen our foibles, without self-deceit, feel less hectically about many matters, on the whole become more serene and more tolerant of others.

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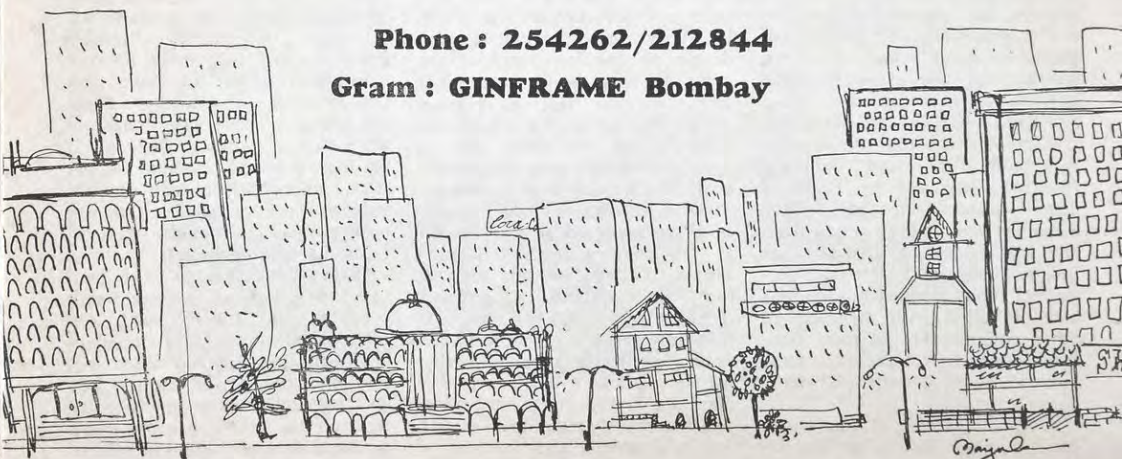
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THE BUTTER KING

his chicory-blend "French Coffee" so called for the French recipe it was made from.

When the Boer War erupted in South Africa, England pledged her colonies for rations to feed the Imperial troops, and among these were consignments of Polson's coffee from India. At the outbreak of global war in 1914 Polson was supplying huge quantities of coffee for the men defending the British Empire on front-lines around the world.

It was during the same period that Colonel Dickson, then in charge of food supplies for the Army remarked in passing to Polson, how difficult it was to obtain good quality butter: no entrepreneur was willing to spend large sums in the dairy industry; dairy farmers were few and far between and they separated cream from the milk by laborious, archaic methods. They were poorly paid for their efforts and often had to trek long distances to cream merchants. There was no way of guaranteeing that the final result would be wholesome or palatable. Polson faced the challenge by placing his own milk-separators in villages of the Charotar area in the Kaira District. In this manner he could supervise the conditions under which the cream was produced as well as ensure the dairy farmers the regular income which made it worth their while to produce cream. Convinced that India could make dairy products of the same quality enjoyed abroad, Polson imported the technical skill and heavy machinery from the dairy-rich countries of the continent to stock his industry. At the cost of seven lakhs, the Polson Model Dairy at Anand was put into operation, and by 1943 was producing its maximum output of three million pounds of butter.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Polson's industry began to explore fields afresh. Along with the many tons of butter supplied for the Defence Services, substantial quantities of cheese were also being produced and bought. As the armies of

Imperial Japan marched relentlessly through the jungles of South East Asia, the provisions for the British troops coming via the Pacific Ocean were being strangled, and at this point Polson was the sole supplier of cheese to the British regiments in Asia. Coffee production, far from lagging behind, was boosted as large consignments were commissioned by the United States Forces stationed in the East. It was in recognition of these services that the U.S. Supply Offices assisted Polson in setting up the premises necessary for the mass production of coffee, even procuring some of the materials for doing so. Fitted out with the latest machinery, Polson's factory was the only one of its kind in India. Innovations included equipment for handling every stage of coffee production, a tin manufacturing plant and a giant roasting machine with a capacity of 8,000 lbs of coffee per day.

In 1945 the Government of India honoured Polson's achievements by requesting him to be responsible for the supply of whole-milk to Bombay city. Rising to the situation, the Anand Dairy began by supplying 17,000 lbs per day, gradually increasing output till in 1946, it peaked at 50,000 lbs per day. With the success of the Bombay milk scheme, Polson went on to set up large dairies in Bihar and Patna, gaining recognition from the State Government for his services to the dairy industry and the farmers it supported.

Though the father of a large and growing industry, Polson was able to spare his time and resources for the needy. He built hospitals in several places including the Mission Hospital at Anand with its Parsi ward, constructed wells in the villages of the Kaira District and contributed forty lakhs of rupees towards charitable trusts many of whose beneficiaries were, and still are, Parsis. When he died on the 6th of November 1962, Polson left behind him a dairy empire that continues to flourish, and a name that is synonymous with good taste and quality.

In an era of synthetic food and artificial flavours, the saga of an empire founded on pure butter products must seem distant. It is a century since the man who headed such an empire, Pestoji Edulji Polson, was born. A pioneer in the field of dairy produce in India, his aegis once extended from Bombay to Bihar, and earned him a reputation for quality which ensured his brand name a place among all the varieties available on today's markets.

The story of the butter king starts humbly, when a thirteen-year-old boy named Pestoji Dalal left home to seek his fortunes in Bombay. Scraping together a hundred rupees he bought himself a small hand-operated coffee-grinding machine. In the heart of the city he rented a tiny room for eight rupees a month and set up shop selling coffee powder, combining in himself all the functions from proprietor to peon. Fate smiled on his nascent industry, and by 1910, he had successively outgrown rooms in Crawford Market and the Times Building, settling finally in Frere Road behind the General Post Office. A touch of nostalgia, perhaps, prompted him to name his concern "Polson" after his childhood pet-name "Polly". Initially earning a reputation for the uniform quality of his product, he gained renown on account of

SHAPOORJI PALLONJI



'THE LAST OF THE SETHIAS'

He was a legend in his own life-time... the conspicuous failure at school who became the "master-builder of modern Bombay", the daring entrepreneur who faced innumerable difficulties only to emerge triumphant each time, the man endowed with the Midas touch which turned everything he touched into gold. Such was Shapoorji Pallonji Mistry, the "last of the Parsi Sethias", as a top executive hailed him on the day of his funeral, March 1st.

At the time that he joined his father's firm, Pallonji Littlewood and Co. in 1901, he was only 14. The concern had already established itself as an eminent firm of contractors, having been associated with the building of the Hanging Gardens in 1875. But by the time young Shapoorji came on the scene, the company was passing through

rough weather. Shapoorji was the only one of his father's sons to enter the rough-and-tumble contracting trade—a trade known for all its hazards, its fluctuations and its labour problems. Yet his very first undertaking, the construction of the Chowpatty Footpath, gave him a view of life that was to embolden him in later years to undertake massive jobs of construction before which other competitors would cower. It was a small contract of about Rs 12,000—decades later, individual contracts of more than Rs 5 crores were to be common—but it left him after nine months of sweat and toil with a profit of Rs 2,000. Young Shapoorji drew from this the most important calculation for his future life. If within nine months he could earn in this small contract Rs 2,000, he, a simple non-matriculate, was

earning a monthly remuneration almost four to six times what graduates in Arts and Commerce were then earning.

Thus was Shapoorji launched into a career that over a period of seven decades made his firm's name inseparable from the history of modern Bombay. The magnificence of the solid structures of the Reserve Bank, the Mercantile Bank, the Bank of India, the New India Assurance, and more recently the State Bank of India bear testimony to his contribution to the world of banking and insurance; the Taj Mahal Inter-Continental and the Oberoi-Sheraton, rivals though they may be, were contracted by Shapoorji Pallonji; the construction in the late 1930's of the Mithapur Complex of Tata Chemicals at Okhamandal with the then highest chimney in India and of the

first rayon plant in the early 1950's in the then wilderness of Kalyan are but two examples of the spirit of adventure with which the skilled craftsmen and engineers of Shapoorji Pallonji were to go to far-off places, brave the hardships of staying in barely habitable places, and then endow these underdeveloped areas with townships and industrial factories. It was this spirit of adventure which emboldened his firm to embark upon what is possibly the first major international contracting work undertaken by an Indian firm, the construction of the Palace of the Sultan of Oman at Muscat. By now, the total value of the foreign contracts has run up to £13.5 millions with an Indian complement of over 500 engineers and workmen.

Shapoorji's industrial career is admittedly less well-known; yet it is worthwhile to note that the firm of Shapoorji Pallonji, through its investments in Bradys, Bombay Dyeing, A.C.C., and the like was ranked among the 20 largest industrial houses of India in the early 1960's. Since then, the firm has gone back with a vengeance to its "construction heritage".

For the student of modern management familiar with the growth of large corporations, the phenomenal growth of the firm of Shapoorji Pallonji would provide a classic case of the now slowly fading-out culture of "the Sethia". His ties with his employees were not organisational, but personal—barely an hour after his wife was confined to the Towers of Silence, his poorest employees thought nothing of warmly hugging him in a spirit of shared sorrow. For the Sethia had himself known poverty, and had known it in the raw—there were days on end when a meal was the only meal. Masterly and at times abusive, he was on his feet twelve to fourteen hours a day with the workmen at the place of construction; he literally sweated in the company of his labourers. Shapoorji was no lavish pay-master, but he could always be approached in times of distress. He built around him a team of small craftsmen, many of whom were individually to become rich as the fortunes of the firm grew. Their children and grand-children were, directly or indirectly, part of the establishment. Conditions of work in the Sethia's

outfit would not have satisfied a modern personnel manager, yet there was never a single strike in his establishment over a working life of more than seven decades.

He would return the greetings of the poorest with a bow. Yet many of his charities, lavish as they were, were donated without a flourish—and many a Parsi hospital, Parsi school and Parsi *atash-beram* will miss his silent yet substantial donations. Each month his contributions to needy students poured in. His known charities have run into lakhs. At a time when the major Parsi institutions, particularly the housing estates, the hospitals, and the *atash-beram* are facing a growing crisis of resources, Shapoorji's silent, sustained and significant contributions to their preservation will be sorely missed. Yet, befitting a Parsi, his charities were also spread out to other communities.

It was part of the Sethia's culture to dare, ever to dare and to dare ever more. There was a time when he found himself tied in increasing knots in the making of a film; nearly a crore and a quarter was to leave his coffers in the rescue of "this Mughal-E-Azam" operation. Yet courage and hope never left him. The pay-back came and came in torrents. It was this same courage that made him dare to take the contract for the building of the Brabourne Stadium—for years he never knew whether he would fully recover his costs. But he did—and India gained its biggest and best cricket stadium. "No risks, no gains" was Shapoorji's continuous refrain, and a fanatical faith in the miracle of prayers assured him that the darkest tunnel had sunlight at its end.

A little-known aspect of Shapoorji was the fact that on at least two major occasions, he staked the greater part of his fortune to stand by his benefactors. That both these benefactors—one a Parsi and the other a Hindu—in turn did not eventually forget his kindness, he accepted as the Law of Providence which never forgets to reward generosity.

With Shapoorji has died perhaps the last embodiment of the "Sethia culture" in the Parsi community; a new "organisational" or "corporate" culture now beckons to the Parsis. We are today at best a community of top professionals; at worst, a

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community of clerks. Entrepreneurship in its raw, risk-taking form is noticeably on the decline; yet we need to remind ourselves that it was within our own lifetimes that a person, not born to great riches nor a recipient of great degrees, built up an empire in the form of monuments that this country will long cherish.

Below is a personal sketch of Shapoorji Pallonji Mistry by Ms Ratan Karaka whose family had a long standing association with Shapoorji.

For him life had been turbulent, exciting at times, even thrilling. To most his name will be synonymous with success but to those who knew him well he was also a symbol of 'cheer', of fun. There was something about the man and his exuberance that filled you with delight.

Coming from a very modest background, the dizzy financial heights he rose to did not change his essential character nor his simple habits; he lived from beginning to end simply.

Like the Parsis of old when he took off his pugri he never kept his head bare. A soft, silk, black Parsi cap covered his crew cut length hair. The pockets of his long Parsi coat bulged with spectacle cases, notes, cheque books, slip books and a wad of notes. He liked to pay cash on the dot. All day he rushed around in his old, red Ford sitting always at the edge of the back seat holding on to the front seat, directing the driver.

The man who spurred him on to success and helped start his career was that financial wizard, F. E. Dinshaw. Dressed in simple, white, duck pants with the coat buttoned in front, a black and yellow spotted pugri on his head, Shapoorji came each day to Dinshaw's French-styled home. He would stand there in one corner, his hands clasped, not out of servitude but respect, and say, "Sir, what can I do for you today?" Dinshaw, a rather tempestuous, excitable man who mixed with only a few people, would give him instructions. Shapoorji usually met the challenge.

The first buildings Shapoorji constructed in Bombay were 'Firdous' and 'Bahistan'. In those days Bombay was a city of gracious bungalows and beautiful living. To match its style Shapoorji

built his flats with the same graciousness and good taste. When he built, Shapoorji used the best materials, the most astute architects, and picked the most glorious designs for his structures. The facade of the buildings were solid stone, the ceilings high, the steps grey and white marble, the walls pastel coloured, the brass fittings superb, the railings of the staircase in finest wrought iron and polished brass. Shapoorji never used anything but the finest for his tenants. The tiny pebbled pathway, the wrought iron gates they were all in harmony with the building. He once said that he picked this piece of land because there was a little bungalow there that had belonged to the first Sir Jamshedji Jeejeebhoy. He thought it was very lucky to build on it. Luck it was for from then on Shapoorji built some of the finest apartments in the city. Windsor House opposite the Oval, Southlands in the deeper south, Mayfair, Mayfair Gardens, Heliopolis, Petropolis, Acropolis, Sterling Apartments, Hampton Court, just to name a few. Even the names of the homes he built had cadence and charm, the association generally being with the west.

Each Monday morning he would call on my family as he did on a great many of his tenants and say: "Now what would you like done? A change in colour to any of the rooms?" "A new fan?" "Is that marble polished enough?" "Are the geysers working?" He would sip a cup of tea with us and generally accompanying him was, his partner Rustomjee Patel. "I like my tenants to live beautifully," Shapoorji used to say. "I like them to enjoy themselves. I like my property to be in order." Later taxation worries caused him to sell many of his great homes. But though he built hundreds of flats he himself lived in a most simple apartment off the Causeway called Dantra House. "I like this spacious old house," he said. "It's lucky and I'd be sad to part with it."

So it was with his office in Meadows Street. A steep one floor rickety stair case led you to a room with a giant ceiling. It was dark in there and the light came in only in the afternoon. Shapoorji's desk was of black oakwood with two drawers. A crystal inkwell, a

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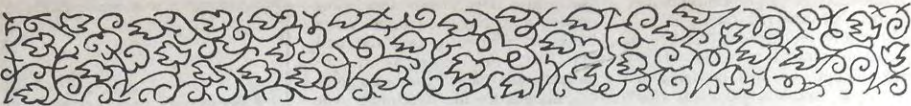
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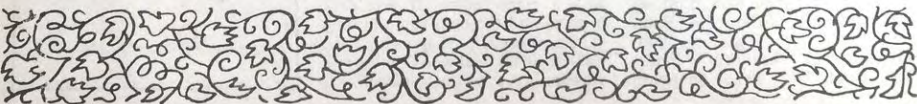


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liberally spotted blotter and a longish pen were his cherished possessions. He sat in an old fashioned swivel chair.

For him there were no cocktail parties, no dinners, no spectacular shows. Shapoorji loved his tot of Scotch in the evening and the odd little bits of small eats to soften the drink. He enjoyed his game of bridge and when his partner made a mistake he would jump up from his chair, get terribly excited, slap him on the back and say "God, what a fool." This would be promptly followed by, "I am so sorry, you know how one gets excited," and proceed to pat his back and the game would go on.

"Why don't you travel around the world?" I once asked Shapoorji.

"I have no desire, my child," he replied "I once took a plane to Bangalore but never again." Gesticulating wildly he said, "as soon as the aeroplane took off I ran up and down the aisle," and he demonstrated by running up and down the verandah. "I was crazy up in the air with nothing to cling on to. 'Stop at once and open the door. Let me out. You can keep your modern travel, get me out on some land.' That was the end of my travels. I prefer to stay in my own Bombay, firm on land." He disliked Western clothes, he found them uncomfortable. "All this nonsense about coats and ties and waist-coats and particular shoes and hats, most uncomfortable."

Most of Shapoorji's money came from real estate and that was what he believed in. He often used to reminisce and I've heard him say "land is the only real thing." Though he was a director in so many businesses he loved building most of all. To him it was like creating a painting or a piece of sculpture. In this he expressed himself. In this he put the real Shapoorji.

To his friends Shapoorji was known as 'Sapa', short for his two first names and till the end he was a good friend to the hundreds he had known through the years. He was a financier for many people and had a generous heart for anyone who was in a tight spot. He was everready to help anyone who wanted to help himself, anyone who needed a genuine push, but he was never the hard-hearted financier. In his heart there was tender-

ness for a collapsing business, tenderness for a man who had seen a good life and was down because of certain circumstances that had overtaken him.

Shapoorji gave a helping hand for many causes. He helped a young girl start a pictorial newspaper, he helped a man dig a mine, he helped another start a challenging business. "Help others and God will help you", was his credo and if the person failed there was never a word of reproach, never an angry scene, but always a helping hand. Shapoorji admired beauty. He liked to see pretty faces and shapely figures. "What's wrong with admiring beauty," he would say and his eyes twinkled to see a modern miss whiz past in her self-driven car. With his own children he was very liberal. He could not understand "all this modern business" but he realized that they had a point of view. He saw to it that his children were happily settled.

Socially he would seldom accept an invitation except from those he knew very well. But come an illness or a sad moment, Shapoorji would be at the door to comfort, advise and guide. And though for many summers he lived rather a secluded life he was never forgotten. He liked to feed the poor and comfort the sick but if he was solving a particular problem and someone irritated him for a donation he could get slightly peevish. The man had perhaps got tired of giving and one could understand the immense pull on his purse in the rising inflation of the later years. Of his own free will he had made many *mantas* (vows). The late Mother Anna Huberta said that when Shapoorji first saw the condition of St. Catherine's Home then a mere cowshed, he wept and resolved that if a certain wish of his came true, he would build a nursery that was worthy of his power. He did. On another occasion he rebuilt a Parsi well where the faithful said their prayers morning and evening. Above all was his devotion to God. Each morning at sunrise after an early bath he faced the east and said his *Avesta* prayers, and he never set out to work without once visiting his favourite *agary*. Before sitting down to his frugal repast, he did his ritual *kusti*, and then at dusk he said his longer prayers before settling down for the night.

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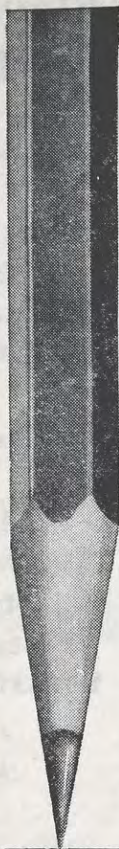


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Hinnells (Continued from page 23) pence movement was led by some Parsis, its most bitter critics were also Parsis. To the majority of the community the move for Independence was nothing less than treason, the result could only be destruction and chaos, views expressed very forcibly in *Rast Goftar*.

The middle-class Parsis at the turn of the century became so westernized that they were more British than the British. Prof. Marshall of Bombay University Library drew my attention to a fascinating journal called *Hindi Punch*, an Indian version of the English magazine *Punch*. It was edited by a Parsi, so the cartoons depicting the Parsis were not simply caricatures of the Parsis as seen by outsiders—but caricatures of how the Parsis projected their own image. In many of the cartoons and articles published in this magazine between 1903 and 1910, Parsi men are characterised as compulsive gamblers, always to be found at the racecourse and smok-

ing the biggest cigars imaginable. The women are represented as forever brushing their hair, holding daily tea parties, proud of the fact that they not only do not know how to cook, but do not even know where the kitchen is in their own house. The aim of men and women alike is presented as marriage to a wealthy European. Like most car-

middle-class Parsis in the early part of the 20th century. This attitude permeated all walks of life—including religion. The popular religious literature of the period so presented Zoroastrianism that it was indistinguishable from Christianity. Lives of the Prophet were written with accounts of his temptations, miracles and sacrificial death which

In short the migration to Bombay has resulted in a smaller and a more aged community.

oons the image may be exaggerated, but there is some truth in the picture.

The point of all these practices is not so much that they were enjoyed—but that they were done because this is how Parsis thought English men and women behaved. Anything and everything British was the aim and practice of many

but for the name read just like the life of Jesus Christ. Parallel to the work of St. Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Jesus Christ*, a Parsi produced in 1910 *The Imitation of Zoroaster*, and another in 1939 a book called *The Gospel of Zoroaster*.

Permeating many of the books of the period are Christian ideas of



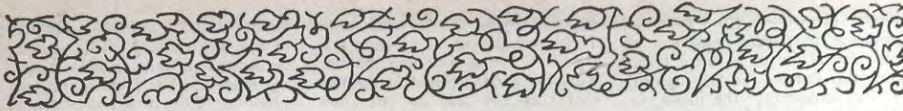
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One of the basic ills of the community is that it has not been true to itself.

sin, death and the evil nature of the flesh. But this was not all. As the age of secularism gripped Britain—so it gripped the Parsi community. Parallel to the English age of scepticism following the work of Biblical specialists came the age of scepticism among the Parsis.

As in Britain, so with the Parsis it became unfashionable to believe in God, or to have anything to do with religion. The age of religious indifference came to the community as it devoured western education. Once again that which made the community great had in it the seeds of the community's decay.

What are the answers? Since 1910 at least there have been calls for Parsis to return to their traditional occupation of agriculture. *The Journal of the Young Men's Parsi Association*, in the early part of the 20th century frequently contained articles appealing to Parsis to go back to the simple life of the farm. A number of charitable trust funds were established to enable families to go back to the pure and simple life of the land. The basic idea was to get away from Bombay, and its corrupting influence. Whether such a solution was possible 60 years ago I do not know, but I am sure that it is now an unrealistic ideal. The lands have been sold, the traditions lost and the will is gone. Prof. Gould, who is carrying out research on the Parsis in the rural villages near Surat, has found an almost universal desire to escape from the villages for what are thought of as the benefits of the city. Few rural Parsis are in fact rural anymore. From the age of four or five they are sent away to school in Surat or preferably in Bombay, and so in their most formative years absorb the values and ideals of the city life. Those who are so-called farmers generally employ a superintendent to oversee the work of labourers, and so cut their own income—whereas members of other

communities do their own work. There is still the tradition that the Parsi himself does not work with, or dirty, his hands. Nor as far as I can see is there the will among the Parsis of Bombay to drop their office jobs and work on the land. For better or for worse Parsis will increasingly congregate in cities and, above all, in Bombay.

A return to the land is, therefore, in my opinion an unrealistic plea.

The second solution I have heard is for a redistribution of the charitable funds to provide cheap housing for the young to enable them to get married earlier and so produce more children. If this could be done it would be a very constructive step and, as far as one can see in advance, would help to increase the numbers and age structure of the community. Such a move would make more constructive use of a number of charitable funds than is being made at present, for it could help towards solving one of the most urgent problems.

But the solution may not be as simple as it at first sight appears. The hands of the trustees of the charities are bound by the wills of the deceased. To change the nature or object of the trust it would be necessary to go to court, and that is both a lengthy and a costly process, indeed it could cost more than the money in the fund which it would release.

Such a move, if possible, is highly desirable—but even that would not stop what I suspect is an even bigger drain on the manpower resources of the community—those who choose to leave through intermarriage or simply lose their Parsi identity.

The third solution proposed is to make a totally new start by emigrating to another country. In the early part of the 20th century the land suggested was Africa, now it is Iran. From the 1920's, and mainly through the Iran League, there have been calls to go back to the land of the Prophet. Such

calls have particular force now with the present wealth of Iran, its hunger for industrious, educated and trustworthy workers.

But it would be foolhardy to ignore the problems such a migration could create. Can a community simply turn its back on over a thousand years of history? If you date the creation of the English race to William the Conqueror, then the Parsis have lived in India longer than the English nation has existed.

Whatever the community's present problems, India has been a good motherland to the Parsis. Few, if any, other countries would have offered such hospitality to an immigrant group, and accepted—even respected—the great economic and political success of that immigrant minority. The Jews in Europe have not had such tolerant hosts.

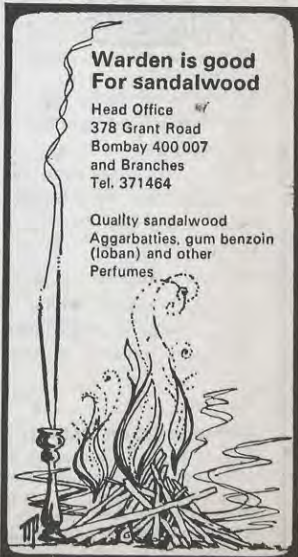
One should consider the ethical question of leaving India at a time when she needs able and honest workers, for a land flowing with milk and honey.

So we come to the last suggestion. The solutions I have discussed all deal with the physical problems of the community. It is obviously right and proper to deal with such problems—it is no good

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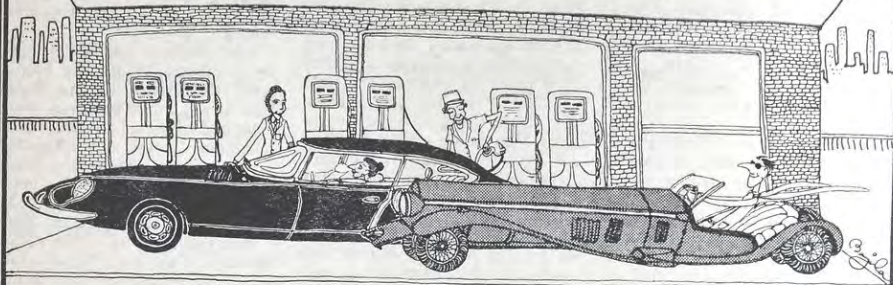
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preaching religion to someone who is starving to death. But I have not seen many Parsis in Bombay starving to death, and a phrase from the New Testament seems to me very appropriate—"man shall not live by bread alone". The problem of a dwindling and aging community is obviously enormous but even more basic, it seems to me, is the second problem—that of identity. There are two more sayings I would like to quote—"know thyself" and "to thine own self be true."

One of the basic ills of the community is that it has not been true to itself. Where I believe the community went wrong was in the way it copied or aped the West. Those who failed the community were the ladies with well-brushed hair at tea parties, not knowing where the kitchen was and dreaming of marrying a wealthy westerner, or the cigar-smoking men at the race course. That generation departed from its own ideals and deserted its tradition, they and those like them are not true to themselves. It was not the British who created the Parsi community—it was the teaching of Zarathushtra. Zoroastrianism was the foundation of the Sasanian Empire, it was to keep alive the teachings of the Prophet that the Parsis came to India, it was Zoroastrian traditions which kept the Parsis a distinct community in India, and it was the principles of Zoroastrianism that were the basis of the lives of the great Parsis—the ideals of truth, honesty, charity and work.

Without that basis there can be no heart, no soul, in the community. Unless you hold racist views like those of Hitler you cannot justify the distinctiveness of the community in any other way than by the ideals which have come down from the Prophet. It was not the departure of the British that brought about the community's decline—but the departure of Zoroastrian ideals.

What is so terrible is that so many of the community do not know their heritage. I am only echoing a comment of countless Parsis when I say that the tide of religious knowledge is at a really low ebb. When the Christian missionary J. Wilson converted two Parsi boys and published an attack on Zoroastrianism in 1843 the community reacted strongly, at first

violently. Then under the gentle leadership of K. R. Cama steps were taken to see that the community knew more about its unique heritage—the teachings of Zarathushtra—so that it could resist the onslaught of missionaries.

But what Wilson and other missionaries failed to do, and what the Arabs failed to do—crush Zoroastrianism—Western secularism, materialism and religious indifference are doing very effectively. Whereas before the Prophet's followers have acted decisively, now it seems little is done.

I know of several individuals—who you all probably know of many—who have not found spiritual fulfillment within the community, and so they have turned elsewhere—to Hinduism, to Christianity, to agnosticism. They do not turn away because the spiritual element is not in Zoroastrianism. It is there in full measure, but they are not shown it.

You will notice that I have deliberately avoided the question of conversion. I have done this because it is not for me as an outsider to comment on internal religious debates. But there is one thing I would say—seek above all the conversion of the community. It seems pointless to take measures to increase a community unless that community has an identity. And the identity of this community is based on the teachings of Zarathushtra. The great need, it seems to me, is for the religious education of the community by all possible means—by classes in the

fire temples, by classes in the Cama Institute, by columns in your papers and magazines. Of course some will reject the Prophet's teaching. That is only to be expected. Zoroastrianism is a religion of free will, but all will be the better for having learnt of the Zoroastrian ideals and many who at present are given no opportunity will be able to share fully in their religious and spiritual heritage.

I stress the need for an all-round religious education because it seems to me that when Parsis have studied religion they have most often concentrated on language studies. Of course languages are important—but it is the content not merely the language of the Prophet's teaching which is of ultimate significance.

Parsi history is littered with grandiose schemes and eloquent appeals from which nothing has come. Let me, therefore, make one specific proposal. If the community will raise the funds to send students with sufficient academic competence and above all the will to learn about their faith, I will ensure that at Manchester University such students are given an intensive course in the history and teachings of their faith. After a year's intensive course which could include lectures on educational methods, they could themselves help to teach others in Bombay. If the community wishes for this to be done, it can be done. This is one specific proposal, it alone would obviously only be scratching the surface of the problem. The main work, the work,

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can only be done here in Bombay and done not by outsiders, but by the community. Outsiders may help, and if they have my cheek they may even prod; but the community here—having as it does able dasturs and others—must do something if any vestige is to be preserved of the distinctiveness of the community—however large or small or wherever that community may be.

The efforts to help the community's physical needs are essential and worthy of real praise. But if these are not accompanied by a drive to regain its identity, the future of the community seems to be virtually nil. If this unique heritage is lost the world would be immeasurably poorer.

Letter (Continued from page 12)

fore, be concentrated firstly towards the welfare of the members of the community ... what is important is for the member Anjumans of the Federation to realize the importance of creating a dynamic body to get on with the job of solving the problems facing the community."

Hostel (Continued from page 17)

prestige, a dilettante's occupation. But social work really calls for perseverance, for grit." She smiled wryly, "One of the comments I'll always remember is a government official telling me 'Why don't you bring a camp-cot and stay here?'"

Kaiser (Continued from page 13)

private institution. This is an entirely separate and private operation. These 25 people have all withdrawn money from their own saving and handed them over to one Mr. Sorabji Irani for the purpose of establishing a private institution."

The *Kaiser* notes that "if an appeal is made to the public for funds or if the members of the public are in any way involved then proper Trustees will have to be appointed and a proper Trust will have to be created...."

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an unregistered Association. If, however, these are gifts to Mr. Pundole, as it appears to be the case, then also it is crystal clear that Mr. Pundole has not paid any taxes...."

"We, therefore, call upon Mr. Pundole, the religious teacher, to make a full and complete disclosure of all the amounts which he has received and to pay not only Income-Tax on it but also Wealth Tax. We also hereby call upon these people including Mr. Sidhwa to state that they have paid gift tax in respect of such gifts made by them, whether out of natural affection or otherwise."

Parsiana wrote to Pundolite Jimmy Shroff, who contested the recent Panchayat Trusteeship election and lost, requesting him to comment on the charges but received no reply. Now these questions and others will have to be answered by Pundole to the satisfaction of not only the Press and the community but also the concerned government authorities.

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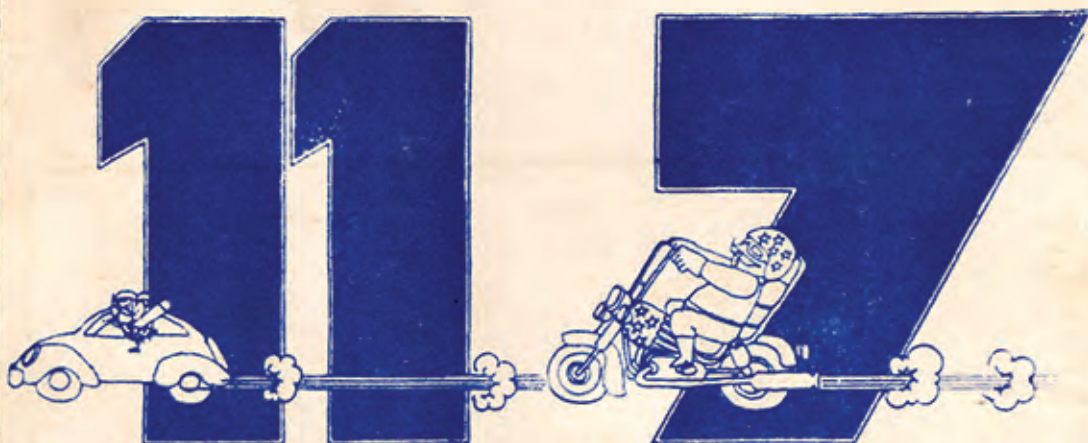
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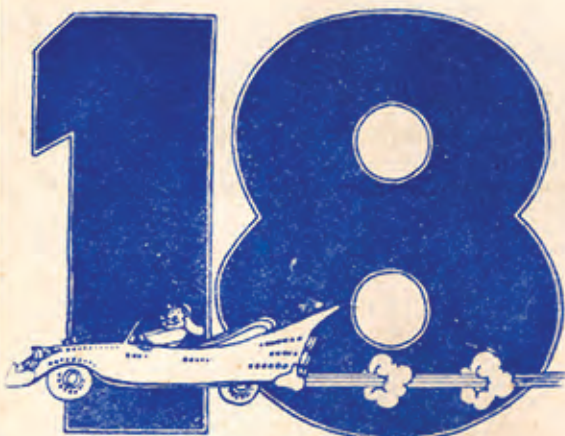


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