

Parsiana

SUPPLEMENT

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In order to keep readers up-to-date with the contemporary events and opinions of the community, Parsiana introduces this Supplement, which will alternate each month with the regular, more familiar magazine. Subscribers will receive the Supplement, in addition to the regular bi-monthly magazines, at no extra charge to the present subscription rate of the magazine. Should resources permit it, it is hoped the Supplement will gradually assume more substantial proportions.

The Controversial Question and the World Congress

Every now and then it crops up, 'the controversial question'. Immediately, there is a move to gloss over it, change the subject or ban its discussion altogether. The feeling is that if it is ignored, it will go away.

But unfortunately, controversial issues cannot be resolved by neglect. They remain to plague, haunt and eventually consume us. The controversy is the symptom, the sign that all is not well.

In our community there are many 'controversial' questions. But the forums to discuss them are limited. Each party states its point of view in the press, at home, wherever they gather. But that only suffices to harden their beliefs. What is required is not two monologues but a dialogue, not a re-stating of views but an exchange of ideas.

The 3rd World Zoroastrian Congress was conceived with the object of bringing the community together. Since the

hosting of the second world congress 13 years ago, there has been a substantial dispersion of Parsis all over the world. Today, approximately one-third of the total world Parsi population lives out of Bombay. If one includes the 25,000 Zoroastrians in Iran, the proportion comes close to half. The problems they confront may differ from those faced by the majority of Parsis in Bombay and Gujarat; but that cannot disqualify any party from a fair hearing.

It is only by voicing all viewpoints, that a common ground can be found for arriving at decisions. The greatest purpose the Congress can serve is as a forum for such a dialogue. At present the procedure to be observed at the Congress is that the chairmen of the various subjects are empowered to stop discussion if disorder is anticipated or occurs. It is hoped that the occasion will not arise for the chairmen to

exercise this prerogative. An unruly handful should not be permitted to hold the entire Congress to ransom.

Past experience has shown that when a crisis is full-blown, the conservative and liberal sections of the community are willing to come together to safeguard each other's interests. This was evidenced at the last executive council meeting of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India held in Poona, when the liberals, who are in a minority, and the conservatives, who are in a majority, arrived at a mutual understanding which made it possible for the Congress to be held. What was achieved in September in Poona can certainly be repeated in Bombay this January; but only if all parties accept the *bonafides* of one another and work towards common goals.

(Congress Schedule overleaf.)

The 3rd World Zoroastrian Congress will now be held from 4 to 8 January 1978 in Bombay, according to a press release from the Joint Honorary Secretaries of the Congress.

Except for the Inauguration on Wednesday, 4th January at the Birla Matrushri Sabhagar at 5.30 p.m., all plenary sessions, together with the open forums/workshops, will be held at the Sir Cawasjee Jehangir Hall from 9 a.m. till 5.30 p.m. each day.

Thursday, 5th January

Morning session:

The Priestly Class—its present condition and future uplift.

Ervad Peshotan Peer, P. D. Nargolwala (speakers); B. H. Antia (chairman); Ervad Godrej Sidhwa (rapporteur).

Afternoon session:

Religious Education for the Younger Generation of Zoroastrians in India and Abroad.

Dr H. B. Dhalla, Dr Avan Billimoria (speakers); Dastur N. D. Minocher-

homji (chairman); Dr R. R. Marshall (rapporteur).

Friday, 6th January

Morning session:

The Problems of Education for Zoroastrians in the present set-up.

Dr H. N. Sethna, Dr (Ms) Aloo Dastur, S. S. Pavri (speakers); Ms Gooleston R. Billimoria (chairman); B. H. R. Rustomji (rapporteur).

Afternoon session:

Social and Cultural Survey of Zoroastrians in the recent past, and suggestions for the future.

Dr Lovji Cama, S. F. Desai, S. D. Nargolwalla, J. R. Vimadalal (speakers); chairman not yet announced; Professor K. C. Sheriar (rapporteur).

Saturday, 7th January

Morning session:

Economic Uplift of the Zoroastrians.

Dr F. A. Mehta, Dr J. A. Modi, D. B. Irani (speakers); Professor Rusi Taraporewalla (chairman); H. D. Mehta (rapporteur).

Afternoon session:

Various scholars of the religion on topics not yet announced.

Sunday, 8th January

Morning session:

The Setting-up of an Organization to provide a link between world Zoroastrians and continuity of action after each world Zoroastrian congress.

R. C. Suntook, K. Bhote, Ms F. Sharokh Engineer, Professor E. Munshi (speakers); Dr J. F. Bulsara (chairman); Ms Rhoda Mistry (rapporteur).

Each session will be followed by a workshop preceded by a short break for tea or coffee provided free of charge for all attending.

Seating has been provided for approximately 1,000 persons, therefore, those wishing to attend should enroll at the earliest possible opportunity. Further details from: The Jt Hon. Secretary, Executive Committee, 3rd World Zoroastrian Congress, c/o Office of the Parsi Panchayat Funds and Properties, 209 Dr D. Naoroji Road, Bombay 400 001.

The Crust and the Kernel

Parsiana reproduces below an abridged and edited version of the speech delivered by India's ambassador to the U.S.A., Nani Palkhivala, at a meeting convened by the Bombay Parsi Panchayat on 12th September at Patkar Hall to felicitate him on his new appointment.

Palkhivala, a noted authority on constitutional law and a staunch defender of fundamental rights, claimed this was the first time he had 'addressed a meeting of my co-religionists.' He, nevertheless, went on to state in no uncertain terms his opinion of the current state of the community.

Today, I speak before an audience of about 1,200, and if we are 61,000 Parsis in Bombay, it would be about 1/60, a definable percentage, of the entire community here. I find this deeply touching. You will understand, therefore, if I talk, not about myself, but about you, my friends and co-religionists, whose welfare and future are uppermost in my mind.

I believe that Parsis, perhaps the most minute community in the world which is of any significance at all, have to do something to repay the debt which we owe to this country which gave us shelter 1,300 years ago. The law of Karma ordains the destinies of communities and of nations. Our community has to make the Karmic return, because, but for the tolerance of the Indians then and but for the welcome which they gave us, perhaps the religion itself may not

have survived, except in Iran where the number of our co-religionists is so small. If, in repaying that debt for a favour done to our ancestors more than 1,300 years ago, I can play a tiny, even insignificant, part, I shall regard my life well spent. Men like me come and go, but this great religion which the few of us have been able

to preserve for so many centuries, will survive. In centuries and generations to come we shall have to produce people who will be able to do their bit for the country to which they have the honour to belong.

I believe in all religions, that every religion has something to teach mankind. But I must confess, if I had to

Should co-religionists beg to differ, is one entitled to tell them that they are not true Zoroastrians?



Palkhivala: 'Essence of Zoroastrianism'.

choose a religion purely as a matter of my own rationality, I would choose Zoroastrianism.

As the world progresses, every religion, every creed, every belief, gets encrusted over a period of time, and sometimes the crust is mistaken for the kernel. One has to be very careful to recognize the essence of Zoroastrianism. I do not know Avestan myself, but I have read translations by perceptive people who have had the vision to understand what the Prophet really meant. It is incredible what Zoroaster knew intuitively centuries ago, whichever the millennium he was born in. What he perceived and understood is proved by science today to be totally right. His message was simple; his tolerance, profound. He did not say: Accept what I tell you. His exact words, translated into English by Dr Dinshah Irani, were: Let each man choose his creed with that freedom of choice which each must have at great events.

The Parsi Connection

The Parsis are a diverse and widespread community linked together by a common heritage but separated by the chasm of urban living. Communication within the community is limited to a chance meeting at a navjote, wedding, concert or natak. A more systematic means of staying in touch is necessary. That's why magazines like Parsiana exist. We keep you informed of events and personalities in the community. By doing so we contribute to the wealth of information on the peoples and traditions of this great land and so bring them closer together. Parsiana is your magazine. It needs your support if it is to continue to serve. Subscribe today or gift a subscription.

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would you get us advertisements for the souvenir of our Silver Jubilee Premiere Show of the film ROLLERBALL at the Regal Theatre on Thursday 15th December 1977 at 9.30 p.m. Advertisement forms and tickets are obtainable from and donations can be sent to the Executive Secretary Mrs H. N. Modi, 13, Vatcha Gandhi Road, Gamdevi, Bombay 400 007. Tel. 355241. —Or at R 11, Central Bank Bldg. 3rd floor, Opp. lift no. 3, Sir Homi Modi Street, Fort, Bombay 400 001.

Tickets and advertisement forms are also available at Pyrkes Restaurant, Flora Fountain.

If 'PARSI, THY NAME IS CHARITY', the time to show it is NOW.

If the Prophet, with his inspired divine message could be so humble, who are we, his followers, to think that what we believe is right and nothing else can ever be right? None of us is divinely inspired as Zoroaster was. Whatever field of human activity you may apply your mind to, truth is the most difficult thing to come by. While each one of us has to form his judgement, none of us is entitled to believe that he has come to the ultimate truth.

The spirit in which the whole religion of Zoroaster was conceived needs to be revived and revived today — the spirit of tolerance, the spirit which permits another person to differ from me and which gives me no right to say that I am the sole depository of all wisdom. This was the great attribute of our Prophet. Very few prophets have spoken in such tones. His whole emphasis was — as every one of us knows, as every Parsi child knows — on Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds. The way to salvation which he showed was not by any particular ritual or by any particular ceremony, but by the way you live your life. No one can, either by paying someone else to pray or by having something done, find his way to peace after death. It is only your actions which decide what ultimately is in store for you.

Sometimes we over-emphasize certain aspects which are not of the essence of true Zoroastrianism. There were times when we Parsis, in order to protect ourselves against the depredations of others who were not tolerant and who thought that their religion was the only religion worth pursuing, evolved some customs. Those customs survive today after the need for such protection is over. The indignities to our temples and the dead are no longer possible because we live in a more stable world where there is law and order. Some of the customs followed today were totally unknown in Zoroaster's time. There is no harm in continuing these customs if one wants to. But should co-religionists beg to differ, is one entitled to tell them that they are not true Zoroastrians?

Our religion should be more widely spread and more widely known. We are not all descended from Zoroaster and he was not the fore-father of every one of us. That means that for a period, there was conversion. When was the right to or the pos-

sibility of conversion denied as a matter of our creed? Think for yourselves before you come to any definite conclusion on a vital issue on which the entire future of the community depends. While we have produced some very fine men in the past, it is not as if a community which has produced great men in the past will also produce good men in the future. Nations have been known to perish. It takes a long time to kill a nation. It takes very little time to break a community of only a hundred thousand members.

Secondly, how shall we improve the economic conditions of our community? I myself do not share the view that this religion is destined to die; but we have a tremendous responsibility at this juncture today.

Only the man who is not on the side of truth is afraid of a free discussion.

Our forefathers were so farsighted that they bought the whole of Malabar Hill and made investments which today look almost incredible. We lack this economic foresight at present. We must regulate our community's affairs with foresight, with vision, with the requirements of the community, a hundred years hence in mind. If we diverted our attention from unnecessary quarrels and concentrated on improving the welfare of the community, we shall have done well by our own people.

The trustees of the Parsi *panchayats* in different towns are honestly devoted to that same end. But should we not try to find out new ways to solve the community's economic problems? In this age, old systems will not work any more. This is the age of the technocrat — expert knowledge is needed. You can no longer rely on the old methodology. Our community has brains enough and adequate capacity to employ new techniques of economic development and growth.

I only wish to point out that the problems facing our community are vast and that if useless controversies take up all our attention, no time and energy would be left for the problems and tasks of the day. We are about 91,000 in all in India, according to a reasonable estimate. If you work for 10 or 11 hours a day, and this is not done by everyone, it means just a

million man-hours a day which we can spend either on trivialities or on worthwhile things. We are so small in number that we cannot afford to waste our energies on things which are really not of the essence of our religion. Just pick up any four or five controversies that come to your mind. How does the future of the community get improved or get worsened whether the controversy is decided one way or the other? The human mind is polemical, and we Zoroastrians are — you may take it as a compliment or otherwise — polemical. We like to have a controversy. But I would like to see the day when the controversy is over something worthwhile. Let us quarrel over things which are really of some importance to our future.

I have never yet addressed a meeting of my co-religionists; and I think it would be wrong for me, having a captive audience like this, to inflict on you my own views on many of the controversies that are raging today in the community, but I have a few thoughts which I do feel sincerely I should place before you for your quiet consideration.

The problems facing us are problems which affect the entire future of the community. How do we set about solving these problems? Have a free discussion. Do not try to stop, stifle or suffocate discussion. Truth will emerge from a free debate. An open discussion is absolutely essential to come to the conclusion ultimately. Let truth prevail. Only the man who is not on the side of truth is afraid of a free discussion. Our religion is so wholly founded on truth, that it will always bear scrutiny and discussion. Never be frightened of a discussion resulting in anything detrimental to truth. Discussion has never resulted in the death of truth. It has always resulted in the truth being fortified as a result of different points of view being discussed.

If I have in my humble way presented a point of view, it is in the hope that we shall all collectively make a decision that hereafter, we shall concentrate our energies only on worthwhile problems.

BLEAK HOUSE

Trapped in antiquated buildings by ever-spiralling housing costs, which place apartments in Bombay out of reach of the poor and the middle class, many Parsis live in conditions which are a major cause of community concern. The predicament is reflected in the residential conditions at the Seth Merwanjee Framjee Panday Sanatorium at Cuffe Parade. Once a symbol of Parsi munificence, the 100-year-old, one-storey rest house for transient community members is in a dilapidated state. Attempts to improve conditions are hampered by strained relations between the residents and the property's trustees, as well as by protracted litigation between past and present trustees which has placed matters in the hands of the court receiver. Jeroo Gorimar writes below of her visit to the neglected backwater.



Artefacts of more spacious days.

In the shadow of thrusting skyscrapers on Bombay's southern seafront sprawls the Panday sanatorium — a strangely rural, barrack-like building, sagging under years of neglect. Amidst the once well-tended lawns broods the statue of the founder, Merwanjee Framjee Panday, a pioneer of the cotton-mill industry in Bombay, who

built the sanatorium in 1863. Today, approximately 55 Parsi families are herded under its leaking red tiled roof, with five to six members sandwiched in one box-like room or kitchen. Rickety iron bedsteads and bed rolls line the long gloomy corridors, giving the place the air of a crowded war-time hospital.

Women in faded dressing gowns and *sadra*-clad men sit at the entrance to their dingy rooms and confer with next-door neighbours over a pile of tin trunks. Some had sought shelter at the sanatorium on arriving from remote parts of India to settle down in Bombay. Intending to lodge there for a fortnight, at most, a month, the month had stretched into a year, the year into a decade; and as one weary old man noted, 'I never imagined when I first came here with two-and four-year-old children, that I'd spend over 18 years in one kitchen.'

Some of the tenants had settled at the sanatorium when their houses collapsed; their gigantic four-poster beds, yawning cupboards, portraits of the Queen and school trophies speak of more spacious days. Others had been newly wed 20 years ago and had to speedily forget the pleasures of privacy and quiet; to learn to live with the noise of traffic thundering down the road; to suffer 'outside riffraff sleeping in front of our rooms and stealing blankets from off us when we sleep in the corridors; to have grit and flaking paint fall into our food and rats eat our grain,' according to one of the occupants.

New arrivals have to cart in their own belongings, for the sanatorium provides nothing but meagre living space and a naked bulb which flickers

feebly from 5 a.m. to 7.30 a.m. and from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. when the main switch is turned on by the authorities. 'Even zoppadpattis (hutments) now have 24 hours electricity,' complained an early riser who bathes and gets ready for work by candle-light. During bleak monsoon days when the rooms are too dark for study, children squat in the corridors, using the wooden benches as writing tables.

'People tell us, "You at least have a roof over your heads." But do they know the condition of the roof?' exclaims one harassed occupant, who confesses to have slept under an umbrella for the last several years, when lashing rains make the roof leak. Several related how four members of a family slept under the bed and three on it, on occasions when the rain-swept verandah could no longer serve as an extension of the bedroom. 'In the two decades I have been here, only superficial repairs have been made on the roof. It needs extensive repairs,' said an occupant. 'On rainy days we sleep wrapped in plastic, like children,' joked a wizened old lady who has been allotted only one kitchen as living space, most of which is occupied by a gaping drain carrying mucky water from the neighbouring kitchen. Pleas for another room have gone unheeded; and the family, consisting of the wife, husband and three children, have to search daily for a dry spot in the corridor to spread their bedding. Some residents have strung sheets of plastic over their beds to keep out the rain and have to wake up periodically to empty the water from the plastic into buckets.

'Conditions during the summer are as bad,' says an occupant. Some residents sleep outside their rooms, but those inside have to suffer the relentless heat. 'The room gets so hot that we sleep on towels and have to keep wiping ourselves during the night.' It is a choice between drawing the curtains and shutting the windows for privacy despite the heat, or leaving the windows open to intruders. During the summer, the residents were allowed to install fans at their own cost and pay Rs 45 per month for using the fan and lights at night. Many found the price too stiff and 'preferred to sweat it out'.

The summer also brings near drought conditions in its wake. The few available taps in the compound, 'are only there to see,' remarks a middle-aged woman, who makes 25 trips from the

taps to her room with buckets of water for her seven-strong family. Depending on the number of family members 'operation filling water' may take from one hour to an hour and a half. One bent old lady who cannot lug heavy pails of water, pays 50 paise for every bucket carted to her room. The residents get water only once a day for two hours, and the paucity of water makes the acrid stench from the row of toilets, set at a discreet distance from the rooms, 'nearly unbearable at

times. Normally we have to warn friends and relations to stop their nose before they step in there,' says a resident. 'The flush tanks have been out of order for years, and are now ready to fall on our head.' Doors to three women's toilets are missing.

Tenants pay Rs 15 for a room and Rs 10 for a kitchen and many state that they are prepared to pay higher rents in exchange for better facilities and essential repairs. 'All we ask for is an improvement in our lot.'



Living on the rain-swept verandah.

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