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Parsiana

January 78

Vol. 2 No. 1

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Parsiana World Zoroastrian Congress issue cover: In search of direction.





In Memoriam

Mr. Fali Meherji Variava

Director

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Editor's Column

At a press conference called by the organizers of the Third World Zoroastrian Congress, one of the reporters asked the Bombay Parsi Panchayat Trustees present why there was a gap of 13 years between the holding of the second and third congress. 'Because,' replied BPP Trustee Jamshed Guzder, 'no one took an interest.' Sad but true. For many years this community behaved as though it were oblivious to its existence. Parsis took an interest in everything except themselves. Community affairs were considered the preserve of the elderly, the orthodox, and the eccentrics.

But over the last five years the situation has visibly changed. At social and cultural gatherings, at work and in the home, it is not uncommon to hear community issues being discussed, argued, attacked or ridiculed. Numerous booklets, pamphlets and circulars articulating differing points of view are published and distributed, often without charge. The mass media in India and abroad focus on the community's significant contribution to the country, its diminishing numbers, its method for disposal of the dead, the high incidence of breast cancer and its age old religion, among other features. Even the Indian movie industry has considered it a commercially viable proposition to lend a Parsi backdrop to their productions.

Every year scholars from within the country and abroad come to research and study the social, religious, cultural, economic and demographic state of the community, past and present. Overseas, Zoroastrian associations are springing up at the rate of one or two a year, and symposiums and seminars have been held in Toronto, London and Chicago. The munificence of the Iranian millionaire philanthropist, Arbab Rustam Guiv has resulted in the first Zoroastrian center being established in the New World, with a second due to follow. In India, the formation of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India has resulted in zonal conferences being hosted in Bangalore, Delhi and Secunderabad.

What finally brought about the change, made a lethargic community sit up and take note of itself, organize a world congress? Perhaps it was the realization that all was not well and something needed to be done. Perhaps it was the longing for firmer roots, a sense of identity that could not be derived from imitating other cultures. Or perhaps it was the insecurity of a minority that felt it would be lost in the vast surrounding multitude.

Whatever the reasons, the event that triggered the renaissance was the statement issued by Shiavax R. Vakil, the eminent lawyer and former Trustee of the BPP, on the Towers of Silence in Bombay in 1973 (see *Parsiana* October and November 1973 issues). That and the subsequent developments shook the community to its core. In its wake, people sought desperately to reaffirm or question old beliefs, seek new answers to ageless questions, try to make up for lost time. From the confusion and turmoil emerged the desire to do something constructive. In 1843 when a Christian missionary, Rev. J. Wilson converted two Parsi boys, the community first reacted with outrage and then subsequently acted to create institutions for the study and dissemination of religious knowledge. Over 130 years later the community once again felt the need to strengthen its roots. The Third World Zoroastrian Congress is the outcome of that necessity.

The idea of holding a congress at this time, however, did not originate here. The Zoroastrian Society of Ontario had first decided to host a Congress in Toronto in 1977. One of their main objectives was to inform the general public of their existence and to thereby generate interest in Zoroastrianism. In India, there have been no clear-cut goals for the Congress. Aside from a stated desire to bring Zoroastrians from all over the world together, there appear to be no substantial intellectual objectives. The various pressures brought to bear on the organizers from all sides has resulted in so many compromises, that the Congress appears to be little more than an extended lecture series.

The format of the meeting does not allow for much individual participation and whatever discussion

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that does take place will be subject to approval. And yet it would be unfair to say that the Congress serves no worthy purpose. Like the Wilson and Vakil episodes, it has heightened the community's consciousness. It may serve as an impetus for hosting further congresses, both local and international—congresses where the goals and purposes will be better articulated and known to a larger number of concerned individuals, where constructive proposals for the betterment of the community will be put forth and implemented.

* * *

Among the most newsworthy greeting cards we received for the New Year (we get about two or three; most of our mail is bills) was one from Jeroo and Khushroo Engineer. Khushroo, who works with Cadbury Fry (the chocolate company) tells of a conversation he had with former Prime Minister Ms Indira Gandhi while on a Bombay-bound Indian Airlines flight on October 4th, the day Ms Gandhi was uncondi-

tionally released by a Delhi magistrate. We carry below an account in Khushroo's words:

"When I reached the airport there were hundreds of riot police and thousands of spectators. It could only mean one thing. Mrs Gandhi was going to Bombay on our flight."

"What seat would you like, sir?"
"The one next to Mrs Gandhi," I quipped, half jokingly.

"Here's your boarding card, sir, seat 2C. Mrs Gandhi is in 2A."

Not everyone gets the opportunity to chat-up an ex-Prime Minister. It took me 20 minutes to come up with my opening line! "You've had a hard day M'am, but you look none the worse for it."

Mrs G: (smiling) "All my days are hard. I am used to it. Do you know we almost got crushed in Agra the other day. There were 8,000 people on a platform made for 2,000."

"You underestimated your own popularity" (an improvement over my opening line, don't you think?).

Mrs G: (frowning) "They shouldn't have been there in the first place."

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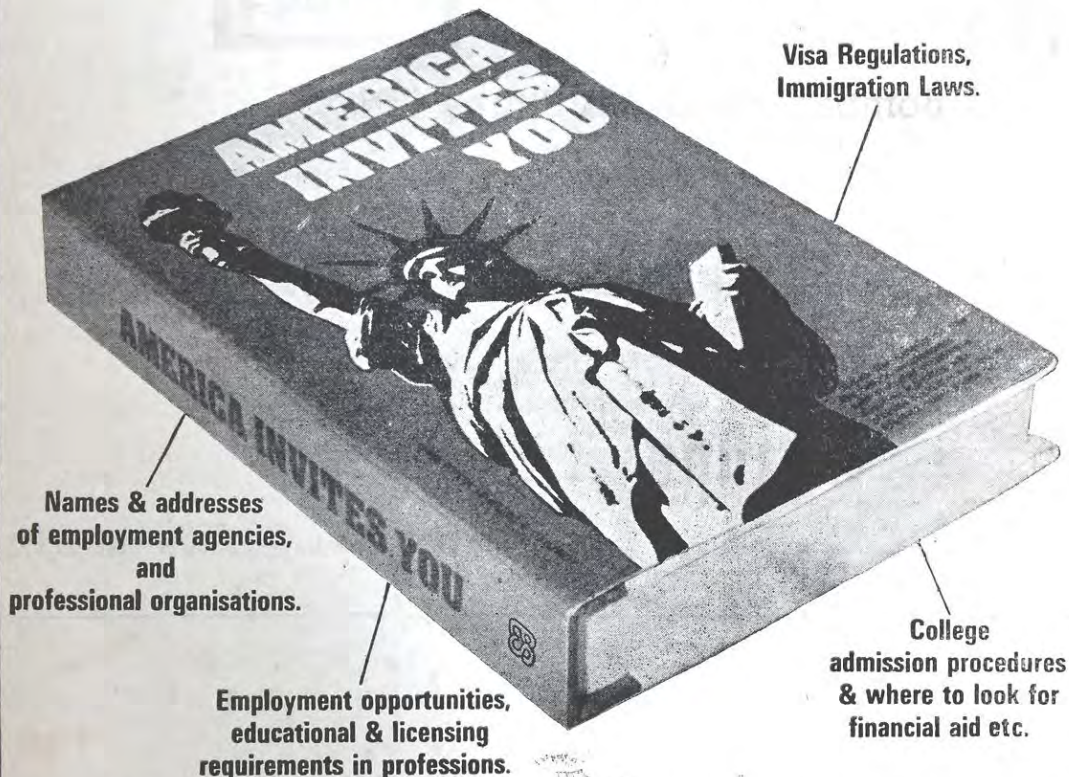


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Says Mr. Krishnan of the Indo American Society, "It's fascinating! A 'bible' for anyone with even the remotest idea of having to do anything with the U.S."

Says Mr. Arun Vakil of the Indo American Chamber of Commerce, "It's 353 pages of the most authentic information with well over 1000 addresses—well, I would not just recommend it to an aspiring immigrant/student/visitor. I would insist on it being read. And re-read."

"What an effort!" exclaims a leading U.S. Immigration Lawyer from New York. "It would'n't be out of modesty when I say I use it, at times, for reference."

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"Did they break through the police cordon then?"

Mrs G: (still frowning) "The police just stood around doing nothing."

Another 20 minutes pass. Come on Khush think of something! "This is probably the best thing that's happened to you since the elections" (not a good lead in. She's puzzled). "I mean it's probably the stupidest thing the Janata Government has done since they took office."

Mrs G: (matter of fact) "Oh no! They have done lots of other stupid things ... what are you reading?"

"Confessions from the Clink... er... purely co-incidental, I assure you!" She laughed. It made my day—make that year!"

* * *

The bird has flown. After struggling with the exigencies of Bombay life for close to a year, our able associate, Ms Shirin Patel has returned to England. In that sunless land, she will lend her formidable skills to the Time-Life book publishing company, her former employers, who intend to bring out a book on Bombay. Shirin is their India Connection. Therefore, yours truly is one again saddled with the day to day miseries of bringing out *Parsiana*. As one of our associates, Ms Ruzbeh Antia puts it:

*'Nodding his head and stroking his beard,
The martyred editor begs to be heard,
"My staff is inefficient, the press is lazy,
Everything combines to drive me crazy,
There's flasks to be washed, coffee to be bought,
And there's the B.P.P. trusteeship to be sought,
There's nothing to be done, just no way out,
But to scratch my head and impotently shout."*

A few days later, Ruzbeh won a scholarship to Cambridge University and gave up a lucrative job at *Parsiana* to teach English at St. Xavier's College for the interim period. Thus, if this issue appears a little truncated, realize it is an act of God, not the management.



Father-in-Law

*After a bath,
having cleansed his body
of the plague of matter,
and after his prayers,
having cleansed his spirit
of the plague of desire,
he entered the fire temple.*

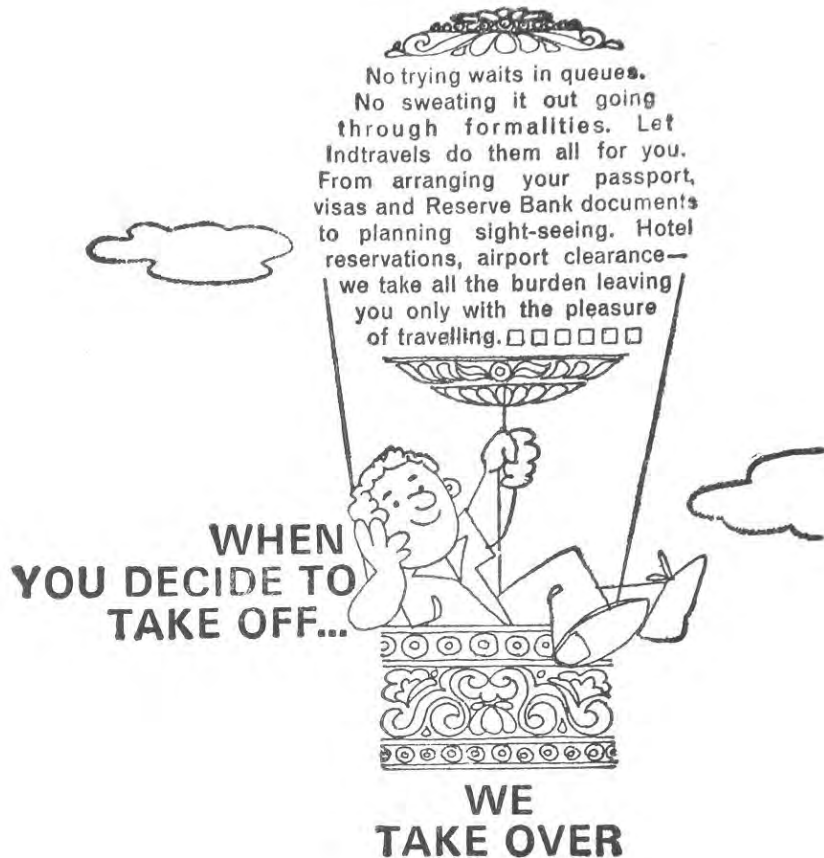
*Bowing before the flame he touched the ground
and applied on his forehead camphor and wood ash
which the Dastur had ladled out of the fire-bowl.*

*Then he lit a butter lamp—
Ahura Mazda had to be told
that the flame of devotion
had been kindled in his heart.*

*Sitting down to his prayers
he meditated on Asha, the Divine Law
and Vohu Mana, the Good Mind
and having crushed Angara Mainyu the evil principle
and Ahriman, the devil
he asked Ormuzd for favours,
the same favours which a warrior or peasant
or a trader in skins and spices
would have asked in the days of
Zohak or Zarathustra—
long life for his son
long life for his daughter
and peace for his ancestors,
a ghost-wall of fungus faces
receding into time
like the avenue of sphinxes.*

*And he stepped out of the fire-temple
to discover
that his shoes had been stolen.*

Keki Daruwala



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Readers' views are welcome on any subject of interest to the community and should be sent to The Editor, Readers' Forum, Parsiana, G.P.O. Box 892, Bombay 400 001. Letters are subject to editing for reasons of space and clarity.

The Congress

No Parsi, however eminent or learned he may claim to be, is morally justified in preventing co-religionists in different parts of the world from keeping in touch with each other and discussing and thrashing out problems which are of vital interest for the preservation and progress of our community in all its aspects.

If scholarship and learning do not go hand in hand with broad-mindedness and tolerance, they are a veritable curse to humanity.

B. S. SURTI
Secunderabad.

Parsi Types

You have stated that Fardoonji Marzbanjee was the first to cut Gujarati type ('Earn & Learn', Parsiana, Oct.-Nov. '77). I should like to add further:

Mobad Fardoonji Marzban, father of Gujarati journalism, prior to printing, publishing and editing his *Shri Mumbaina Samachar* (The Bombay Samachar), published a calendar and some books in Gujarati for which he cut Gujarati type with the help of the ladies of his family. However, Gujarati type

had been cut before this, but in a very limited quantity.

About 160 years ago, when there were no vernacular newspapers in western India, a few Gujarati advertisements used to appear in the *Bombay Courier*, an English newspaper read by educated Indians, for which Gujarati type were cut by Byramjee Jeejeebhoy Chhapgar (or Jeejeebhoy Byramjee Chhapgar) an employee of the paper, in 1797.

Marzban who was a good friend of Chhapgar, used to visit him frequently at the *Bombay Courier* press, which inspired him to start his own Gujarati press. It being the only Gujarati press at that time, no name was given to it for several years. It was known as 'Fardoonjee Murzbanjee nu karkhanu' (Fardoonjee Murzbanjee's workshop) until it came to be known as Mumbai Samachar Press when the paper was printed.

Those interested in further details on the origin of Gujarati type and printing presses in Western India, can refer to the first two chapters of my thesis *Gujarati Patrakari* (History of Gujarati Journalism) published in Gujarati in 1950.

DR RATAN R. MARSHALL
Surat.

Job-Wise

From time to time, we read suggestions in Parsi papers for the economic betterment of our community. To contribute laudable suggestions is one thing, but to implement them and put them into practice is another.

A group of dedicated social workers have met and formed, 'The Employment Guidance Service', which will advise and guide our young to choose their future careers. Those interested may call at 2nd floor, Navsari Bldg. Dr D. N. Road, Bombay 400 001, between 5.30 and 7.30 p.m.

DINSHAW BEHRAMJI IRANI

'Zoroastrians Abroad'

Your new feature 'Zoroastrians Abroad' (Parsiana, Jun.-Jul. '77) makes interesting reading. Since a fair number of the intelligent section of our community has migrated out of India and settled in different parts of the world, it is very necessary that details of the various activities of the Parsis in several

countries are diligently compiled and presented to the community. Maintaining a line of communication among the various groups of Parsis is very important and it is heartening to read of the enthusiasm and pride among the young and old for the upliftment of our community and maintenance of our religious principles and traditions.

RUSTAM T. SAKLATH
Calcutta.

Rustam Saklath is former president of the Parsi Zoroastrian Association of Calcutta.

'Adoption, Marriage and Divorce.'

Rustom S. Gae states, 'Inter-communal marriages among Parsis may be as high as 25 per cent.' Would he please enlighten us how these statistics have been collected and whether they have been published?

He has very rightly stated about our community, 'If it has been able to maintain its identity, uniqueness and traditions, it is primarily due to its socio-economic solidarity, personal laws, religious faith and fervour, and unity in resolving difficulties. It is on these pillars that the community must build its future.' But, he is contradicting himself; by advocating conversion of children of mixed marriages and reforms in personal laws, religious customs and traditions, the author is dividing the community and weakening the very pillars on which the community can build its future.

M. J. GIARA
Madras.

Gae replies: *The percentage of inter-communal marriages among Parsis mentioned in my article was based on speeches made by some of the participants at the first zonal conference of Parsi anjumanas of North India held in New Delhi on 23 January 1977. In this connection the expression 'may be' has been used as the exact percentage of such marriages is not known.*

The children of Parsi fathers by alien mothers who have been duly admitted into the Zoroastrian religion are included by judicial decisions in the definition of Parsis. Whether the children of alien fathers by Parsi mothers who have been admitted into the religion should in the present circumstances be included in the said definition is an important issue for the com-

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munty to consider and decide. Courts would no doubt, consider and decide the issue, if raised before them.

'Season's Greetings'

It is essential that the New Year be celebrated on the same day by, both, the Parsis and Iranis of India. I agree with Dr Jehan Bagli ('Zoroastrians Abroad', *Parsiana*, Oct.-Nov. '77) that henceforth, only Jamshedi Navroz, 21st March, should be observed as New Year's day by Parsi Zoroastrians.

SOHRAB A. KALYAN

The Urban Agiari

It is not only the village *agiari* ('Readers' Forum', *Parsiana*, Oct.-Nov '77) that is dirty and untended, but *agiaries* and *Atash Bahrams* in Bombay also

share the same fate.

The number of *agiaries* in the city should be reduced. For example, within a short radius in Tardeo, there are three or more *agiaries*—one at the junction of Forjett Street and Tardeo Road, another a bit further on and one opposite Grant Road Station. If two of these *agiaries* were done away with and the fire transferred to the remaining one, the land thus obtained could be used for a more practical purpose like housing at cheap rates for Parsi's. Another very bad practice these days is the presence of Parsis begging outside our fire-temples.

If there were less, but better-maintained *agiaries* in the city, Parsis would be proud of their places of worship and would continue to pray in them.

H. B. DAVAR

'Northwest by South'

While appreciating the keen interest shown by the participants at the first zonal conference of the Parsi *anjumans* of North India, (*Parsiana*, Jun.-Jul. '77) where resolutions to convert non-Parsi Zoroastrians, by marriage and by birth, to Parsi Zoroastrianism and to permit non-Parsi Zoroastrians to observe death ceremonies of Parsi Zoroastrians were heatedly debated and received sanction, one is not sure of the competence of the participants to discuss and, particularly to decide on these subjects. Discussion on such subjects and decisions, if necessary, should best be left to competent Parsi Zoroastrians who have devoted their lives to the study and consideration of the Parsi race and the Zoroastrian religion.

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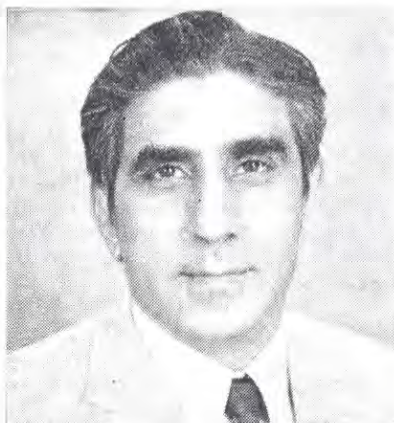
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The Bonn Connection

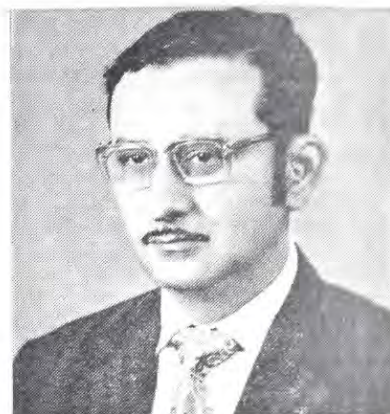
Dr. Fredie A. Mehta, the noted economist and director of Tata Sons Limited, has been elected President of the 1,350-member Indo-German Chamber of Commerce for the year 1977-78. The Chamber is engaged in promoting industrial growth in India.

Mehta, who has been associated with the Tatas for 21 years, hails from Karachi where he studied at St. Patrick's High School. After graduating from St. Xavier's College, Bombay, he won a Tata scholarship enabling him to take his Master of Science degree in Economics at the London School of Economics. At the L.S.E. he won several awards, as a result of which he could complete his doctorate in 1955. He joined the Tata Administrative Services in 1956.



Mehta : Promoting industry

trustees. An active Rotarian, the 58-year-old general practitioner is a trustee of about 30 charitable and religious trusts, both within the community and outside it. He is also associated with numerous social service organizations, being vice-president of the Parvatibai



Bhacca : social service

Leprosy Hospital, the Antituberculosis Hospital, president, Gujarat State Gymnastic Association, director, Gujarat Safe Deposit Company Limited and past president and secretary of the Surat Medical Union. His wife, Mehroo is also a doctor.

New Surat Trustee

Dr. Sam. S. Bhacca who hails from a family of doctors, became the newest and youngest addition to the Surat Parsi Panchayat board of



Coorlawala : search for new dance forms (Photographs of dances performed recently in Bombay).

Uttara dances

Uttara Asha Coorlawala, the New York-based, modern dance exponent, and founder-director of the Mandala Dance Theatre Company, has been awarded a two-year Homi Bhabha fellowship. Currently in India to research Indian dance and incorporate its traditions and images in her choreography, Asha gave a series of USIS-sponsored perfor-

mances in Bombay, Calcutta, Darjeeling and Jamshedpur and is scheduled to give many more.

A graduate of Bombay's Walsingham High School, Asha attended St. Xavier's College before leaving for America. She graduated from Smith College and then studied dancing at the famous Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance in New York. Since then she has been tutored by other masters such as Merce Cunningham, Pearl Lang and Yurikov. She later started the Mandala dance group with trained professional dancers, dedicated to the continuing search for new dance forms. 'Uttara' is the name of a legendary dancer in the Mahabharata and was given to Asha by her guru, Swami Muktananda.

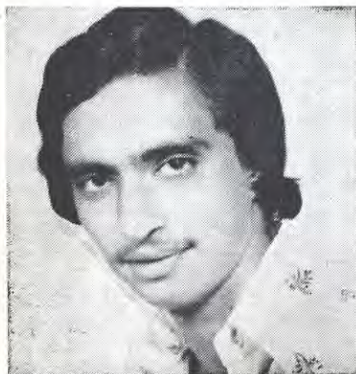


Jussawalla : 'free' verse

Aquatic Achievements

The swimming prowess of 18-year-old Rustom Ratan Marshall helped his college, the Sir K. P. College of Commerce, Surat, to win the team championship at the South Gujarat University inter-collegiate aquatic meet. With victories in the 100, 400 and 1,500 metres free style and the 100 metres backstroke, Marshall also swam away with the individual championship at the meet held at Surat in August.

Besides his aquatic achievements, the versatile Marshall has successfully led his college basket-ball team and has won the inter-collegiate Bhulabhai Desai English Elocution Trophy. The elected University representative of his college, he was nominated by the vice-chancellor of South Gujarat University to serve on the University Students Welfare Board.



Marshall : swimming prowess

Poetic Licence

Poet Adil Jussawalla was one of the writers selected to participate in the International Writing Program held at the University of Iowa, Iowa City, U.S.A. The three-month programme, held from September 1977 to January 1978, permits participants to "do anything, including walking on the water of the Iowa river" as well as making literary contributions.

Jussawalla is the author of two books of poems, *Land's End* and *Missing Person* and editor of the anthology, *New Writing in India*. He has co-edited another anthology, *Statements* and is one of the four poets who run the publishing concern, Clearing House which has brought out collections of poetry by Jussawalla, Gieve Patel, Arun Kolatkar and Arvind Krishna Mehrotra.

IN MEMORY OF ...



Mehta : 'healthy boys'

Born in Navsari, Mehta graduated from the Victoria Jubilee Technical Institute and soon found himself in the mill business. In 1935, he bought over the Crescent Mills which he renamed as the Shri Ram Mills. He sold that concern and took over the Burhanpur Tapti Mills which he parted with a month prior to his death.

Aside from business, he had a 'passion' for *bhajans* and was president of the *Gayan Uttejak Mandali* which organized musical concerts. He was also president of the *Rahnumae Mazdayasnan Sabha* and was responsible for having much religious literature published and distributed. His interest in education led him to found the Boys' Town School in Nasik in 1944. 'He wanted boys to be healthy, (especially) healthy in body' and so he selected the hill-station site, recalled Pavri. Today, the school has over 700 students of all communities and is one of the institutions selected for the education of the Government of India merit scholars.

Centenary Celebrated

The birth centenary of the late Pirojsha Nusserwanji Mehta, the founder of The Boys' Town Public School in Nasik was celebrated on 10th December before a large gathering of students, parents, alumni and well-wishers at Bombay's Patkar Hall. A host of speakers including Sohrab P. Kotval, former Lok Ayukta of Maharashtra, Soli Pavri the school's first principal, and Dr Framroze A. Bode, a trustee of the school, spoke on the life and times of the late industrialist.

A Gool Shavaksha Memorial Fund has been instituted by the Bombay-based social service organization, Time and Talents Club, in memory of its founder president. Ms Shavaksha, who died of cancer in April 1977, helped found the club 40 years ago and developed it into a multi-purpose organization with 22 committees engaged in numerous



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The objectives of the fund are to give 'Grants for research, and Scholarships to students and teachers in the educational, medical and sociological fields, and in the creative arts and emergency help in sickness, for education, and in situations affecting the welfare of deserving persons, especially women and children.'

A programme of concerts is being arranged, the proceeds of which will go to the Fund. Cheques can be made in the name of: Time and Talents Club, The Gool Shavaksha Memorial Fund c/o Victory Stall, Opp. Shivaji's Statue, Chhatrapati

Shivaji Maharaj Marg (Apollo Pier Road), Bombay 400 039.

The memory of the late Dr D. P. Dastur, a noted professor of anatomy has been commemorated by an award instituted by the Alumni Association of the Government Dental College, Bombay. The D. P. Dastur Memorial Award will be given to the student who stands first in anatomy in the B.D.S. (Bachelor of Dental Science) examination of Bombay University.

Dastur, who died on 18 April 1977 at the age of 75, was professor of anatomy at the Government Dental College since its inception in 1945 till he retired. At the time of his death, he was also Emeritus Professor of Anatomy at the Grant Medical College, Bombay.

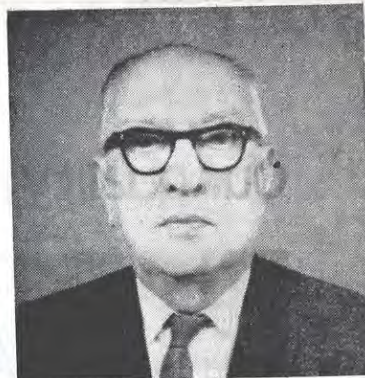
During a 45-year-old association with the Grant Medical College, Dastur introduced a novel method of teaching anatomy in the form of lecture-cum-demonstrations, synchronising these with a study of embryology. He also pioneered the teaching of neuro-anatomy and genetics to undergraduates and helped in the creation of the Anatomy Museum of the College, to which he added over 2,000 specimens.

Died: Dara R. Meher-Homji, 67, who edited the Bombay English daily, the *Evening News of India* for 10 years; of a heart attack at the Parsi General Hospital on 23 October 1977.

'He was a very good judge of news,' said K. Kittu, his successor as head of the editorial department of the *Evening News*; and during Meher-Homji's tenure the newspaper won a government award for excellence in printing and design.

After his retirement in 1970, Meher-Homji free lanced for several newspapers and magazines, writing a regular column of miscellanea under the pen name 'Darius' and a series of articles on Parsi cricketers of yesteryear in English in the *Jam-e-Jamshed*.

A self-taught journalist who learnt his profession 'in the hard school of experience', according to Kittu, Meher-Homji joined the *Times of India* as sub-editor soon after his graduation from Wilson College, Bombay. He served with the newspaper group for 32 years in several responsible positions and was finally head of the editorial department of the *Evening News of India*. 'He always had a flair for



Meher-Homji: 'Good judge of news.'

writing and was very interested in everything around him, particularly politics, so journalism must have seemed the most natural thing to do,' said his daughter, Pervine. His other interests included sport, especially cricket, and music, for which he often wrote reviews for the *Evening News*.

He leaves behind his wife, Amy and his two daughters, Ms Zarin Adi Billimoria and Ms Pervine Pestonji Bhujwala.



Dastur : noted anatomist

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Faith, Hope and Charity

The 'Door of Love' opened on 10th December in the American city of New Rochelle. Before a distinguished gathering of community members, diplomats, judges, local and state officials, politicians and others, the Arbab Rustam Guiv Darbe Mehr Zoroastrian Fire Temple was officially inaugurated. Describing it as a day of 'great joy', the Iranian millionaire-philanthropist, Rustam Guiv, who donated the munificent sum of \$1,80,000 (around Rs 16 lakhs), for the center, thanked the office-bearers and members of the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York 'for giving me this opportunity to be helpful in donating the Zoroastrian Temple in New Rochelle... my special thanks to Dr and Mrs Rustam Sarfeh as he is the person who has not only originated the idea to establish this temple... but has (put in) tremendous work to make this project a success.

'Please be united with each other, worship here, conduct religious ceremonies, discussions, seminars... May *Humata, Hukta, Huvarasta* (good thoughts, good words and good deeds) guide all (and) bring happiness and laughter.'

Heading the list of diplomats present from India, Iran and Pakistan, was the Indian ambassador to the U.S., Nani Palkhivala. 'If to give is more blessed than to receive, then Arbab must be the happiest man alive,' said the ambassador. Referring to Guiv as 'a true Zoroastrian in the true sense of the word,' Palkhivala noted, Arbab 'could not have made a better choice for the exercise of his deep philanthropic interest in this part of the world.'

Eruch Munshi, president of the ZAGNY noted, 'our community has

entered a new era... never (before has the) community achieved so much in (such) a short time... our strength is... what we prove ourselves to be. What we hold, we have earned. What we keep will be no more than what we deserve... our community members are ready to meet the challenge of the future and will contribute (their utmost) to the economic and social growth of America.'

Guiv told the gathering about his past and what motivated him to gift the large sum to the Darbe Mehr (Door of Love). 'I was born in the city of Yazd, in 1888. My forefathers migrated to Yazd from Khorasan about 300 years ago as refugees, as they were forced to do so, on account of growing religious oppressions. Now there are no Zoroastrian families living in Khorasan, as it has become a Muslim religious center.

'For centuries, we Zoroastrians suffered. Parsis in Bombay had a representative in the British Parliament and through his efforts and influence, one Zoroastrian from Bombay, Mr Manekji Hataria was sent to the court of King Nasseruddin Shah through British diplomatic sources. This was about 100 years ago when the religious oppression was extreme. We Zoroastrians had to pay a religious tax called *Jazia* and the Zoroastrians who could not pay this tax had to become Muslims. When King Nasseruddin Shah was requested by Mr Manekji Hataria to pardon Zoroastrians living in Iran, of this tax, he agreed to do so, and we could survive.

'Volumes can be written to describe the troubles, difficulties, and oppression each individual man, woman and child of Zoroastrian faith had gone through for centuries in Iran to survive and to protect our religion. We kept immense faith in our Ahura Mazda, and secretly worshipped Him, and chanted the *Avesta*, our holy prayers...

'When Iran became a constitutional monarchy, our conditions improved. And after Rezashah Pahlavi established the Pahlavi dynasty, we Zoroastrians benefitted. Rezashah was a very thoughtful person, with a dynamic personality, and so

is his son Shahenshah Arya Mehr, the present Monarch of Iran. We Zoroastrians enjoy the same rights as all Muslims enjoy.

'My father was a businessman, first in Yazd, and later in Tehran, dealing in home-made cotton goods. Later my elder brother joined him, and expanded our business, importing shoes and general merchandise from Europe. When I was 20 years old, I came to Tehran from Yazd with my elder brother on mule-back. There was a great fear of bandits then, and we rode day and night for 14 days to reach Tehran. I can never forget those hard days.

'As Dr Sarfeh just told you, I worked hard day and night for years, developing our business and also took active part in politics as well as social activities. From vice-president of the Zoroastrian Anjuman I became the president and was elected many times from 1936 onwards.

'I was a member of Parliament in Iran and was elected five times for (the) *Majlis* when I was time-barred according to Iranian law. I was nominated as a senator, to the Senate by His Imperial Majesty Shahenshah Arya Mehr.

'About 17 years ago, I felt the need to establish the Rustam Guiv Foundation and I did so. I made special visits to India and many foreign countries to observe and plan my activities to help not only my Zoroastrian community but also others from different castes and creeds.'

Guiv has also offered a donation of \$600,000 (around 54 lakh rupees) for a Zoroastrian Center in Toronto, Canada. The money is to be donated from a fund in the name of Guiv's deceased nephew, Mehrban, and will go towards the purchase of around 10,000 square metres of land and the building and interiors of the center.

Challenging Goals

Over 260 delegates representing 20 Zoroastrian communities in North America participated in the Second North American Zoroastrian Symposium on 'Survival and Perpetuation of Zoroastrianism', held in Chicago last summer (see 'Zoroas-

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trians Abroad,' *Parsiana* Oct-Nov. '77 issue). According to a report titled, 'Synopsis and Highlights', prepared by the meeting's chairman, Keki R. Bhote, the objectives of the symposium included the following:

—To knit the separate 'island' communities of Zoroastrians in North America into a cooperative entity that can strengthen their collective future, while maintaining the autonomy of each local association.

—To review religious codes, where mutations from the Indian model may be a prerequisite to survival in a North American milieu.

—To study the inspiring religion of Zoroastrianism, with the help of leading world authorities, in order to instil pride in our faith and strengthen our vitality and power to survive.

'Judged in terms of progress against these challenging goals,' noted Bhote, 'the symposium was an outstanding success.' Among the many recommendations put forth at the meet are the following:

Formation of an Advisory Council.

The council would comprise representatives from each local

Zoroastrian association in North America. The purpose is to increase communication, consultation and cooperation between the isolated Zoroastrian communities and local associations. The council is not to be construed as a federal structure with powers overriding those of local associations. Rather, it is to be a purely advisory body seeking to establish a North American consensus on a number of issues of importance to the Zoroastrian community. Dr Jehan Bagli, past president of the Zoroastrian Association of Quebec, was chosen to coordinate this effort. Minoo Treasurywala of Toronto noted, 'It was a movement whose time had come.'

Endowing a Chair for Zoroastrian Studies at a University

Dr Richard Frye, professor of Iranian Civilizations and Languages, Harvard University, and keynote speaker at the symposium, urged the establishment of an endowed chair on Zoroastrianism at a major North American university. This was one of the ways in which the Armenians saved their religion and their identity 25 years ago. They now have five chairs on Armenian studies. The object was to 'build

at the top', to develop a cadre of *dasturs*, *mobeds* and scholars who can have worldwide academic recognition and strengthen the grass-roots of the community.

Frye visualized this approach as the fastest way to build an infrastructure of Zoroastrianism in the New World—academics, religious leaders, development of religious materials and interaction with a growing Zoroastrian community. The cost of such an endowed chair—one million dollars (Rs 90,00,000) if associated with a university of international reputation—would necessitate a top priority, unified action by the entire North American Zoroastrian community.

Steps for increasing numbers

Dr Jamshed Mavalwala, professor of anthropology at the University of Toronto and president of the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario called for a collective national effort, both in the U.S. and Canada, to influence immigration policies in favour of Zoroastrians. A prerequisite for such a policy would be an awareness by the North American governments that Zoroastrians have special character and integrity, as they do in Iran, and can make a special contribution

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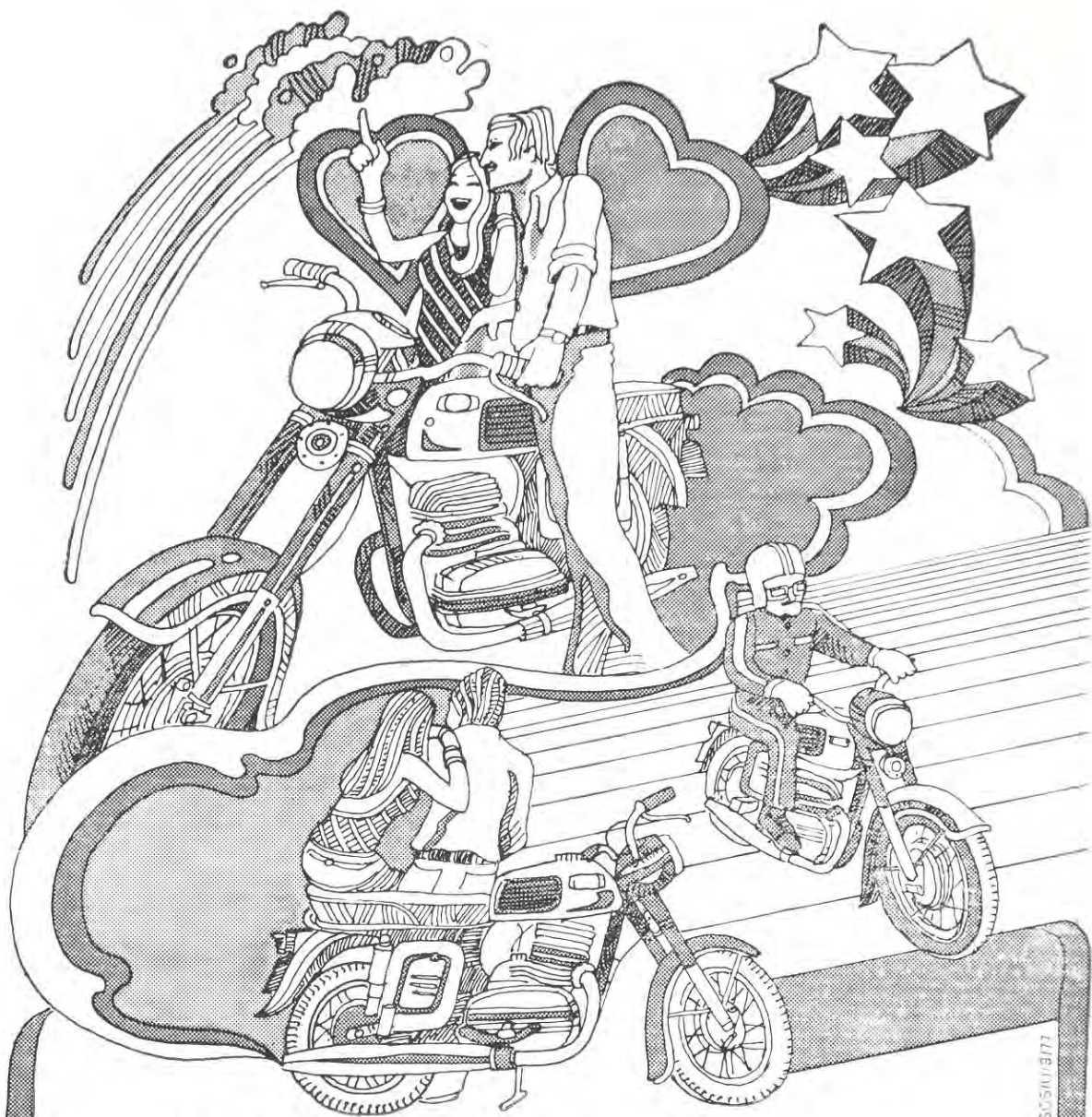
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to the socio-economic well-being of a country, as they did in India. Mavalwala urged active involvement in civic affairs, so that Zoroastrians could be judged by their contributions to North American society.

Bagli urged the acceptance of offsprings of a Zoroastrian and a non-Zoroastrian, irrespective of the sex of the Zoroastrian spouse. Such offsprings should also include adopted children.

Bagli made an eloquent plea for conversion into the faith, quoting from Zarathushtra himself. In Gatha *Ushtavaiti—Yasna* 46, Zarathushtra declares that those who refrain from accepting individuals into the faith will themselves have failed to walk the path of *Asha* and to follow the religion of Mazda. Conversion started with Zarathushtra and was practiced without inhibition by early Zoroastrians. In India, proselytism was stopped because of social and economic circumstances. But conditions on this continent require reappraisal if the Zoroastrian community is not to vanish into history books.

Mavalwala stressed that conversions were already taking place in

Iran. Thousands of Iranians have a desire to search for their pre-Islamic Zoroastrian roots. Dr Parthava Behesht Nejad, professor of psychology at the University of Oregon, outlined the growth of the Mazdayasnan movement with new adherents coming into the fold.

However, both Mavalwala and Bagli struck a note of caution in opening 'the floodgates to the drifting crowds'. They called for standards that could be 'flexible enough to accept expansion and fine enough to reject undesirable influences.' Sam Bhathena, president of the Zoroastrian Association of Washington, D.C., asserted the need for Zoroastrians to be in step with their brethren in India. Going it alone, could result in fragmentation—the same fate that has befallen Christianity.

Frye summarized the whole subject of conversion with his famous epigram: 'It is better to assimilate than be assimilated.'

Educating Children

Dr Lovji Cama, vice-president of the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York, stressed that the focus should be on the children, who did not have the advantage of

growing up in a Zoroastrian milieu. He suggested parents educate themselves about their religion and then teach their children themselves, inject pride in the history and worth of the religion, hold regular religious classes, distribute religious instruction materials and host regional summer camps for more concentrated contacts with other Zoroastrian youth.

CODE CHANGES

Among the 'possible code changes' mooted at the meet were those touching upon:

The Priests

Dr Rostam Sarfeh, founder, publisher, and editor of *Hukt* magazine noted the alarming attrition worldwide in the ranks of full-time *mobeds*. He urged the Zoroastrian community to raise sufficient funds to assure their financial security. Sarfeh also recommended that the ranks of *mobeds* be opened to lay Zoroastrians willing to acquire knowledge and training to qualify as *mobeds*. Sarfeh's suggestions were echoed by Bagli, who urged the abolition of the term '*behdin*'. Knowledge of the religion, rather than heredity,

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Prayers in English

Bagli recommended the incorporation of selected interpretations of our prayers in English to supplement the Avestan lyrics. 'It is crucial', he said, 'to bring within the realm of ceremonial observances, a language understandable both by the performer as well as by the observer.'

Jamshedi Navroze

Bagli urged the restoration of Jamshedi Navroze on 21st March not only as a festival day but as the true start of the Zoroastrian calendar year. 21st March is not only the day of the equinox; it also coincides with *Roj Hormuzd* and month *Fravardin*.

The synopsis of the gathering will be distributed to Zoroastrian associations all over the world free of cost, notes Bhote. 'The symposium has generated many valuable ideas that deserve extensive study, debate and practical action in every Zoroastrian community in the world,' writes Bhote. 'In our quest for vitality and perpetuation of our religion, may this symposium prove to be a historic milestone.'

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CANADA The New Capital

Jamshed Pavri is one of the few chroniclers of Parsi history in the New World. Through his periodic newsletters, he has kept the overseas community informed of their historical heritage both in India and abroad. Below we carry an abridged report of his article on the Parsis in Canada.



At the time of the gold rush of 1866, when people from all over the world came to seek their fortune, there arrived at Barkerville, British Columbia, a lone adventurous Parsi. His name is unknown but most likely he was Mapeckji Faramji Javeri, whom the *Parsi Prakash* recorded as a gold prospector in California around the same time. He was probably the first Zoroastrian to enter Canada.

Today, a century and ten years since that first foray into the vast northern hinterlands of the American continent, there are nearly 1,800 Parsis in Canada. These modern adventurers also came in search of fortune, but of a different kind—higher living standards, better job prospects, professional training. Most are young permanent settlers with a wide variety of vocational qualifications, holding remunerative jobs. Already, increasing numbers of Parsis are buying houses and property, a sign that they are well ahead financially; a few of the more adventurous have prospered in the real estate markets.

Many find their faith sorely challenged by the different social norms and values of their new environment. At marriages there are those who still have the

ashirwad ceremony performed, but it takes a civil procedure to make it legal; in the event of death, though the *geh sarna* nearly always takes place, the country's regulations specify that only members of the gravediggers' union can bury the dead.

The Canada community, however, is still a nascent one, established almost solely within the last decade or so. The first Zoroastrian body to be formed, the Zoroastrian fraternity, was brought into being as recently as 1966, by a small group of 17 "pioneer" Parsis. The four executive members were Dara Dastur, Boman Shah Ghadiali, Minocher Treasurywala and Najamai Shroff. The Fraternity published a small write-up in *The Jam-e-Jamshed*, to provide information and assistance to prospective Parsi settlers seeking richer pastures abroad. To their surprise, they were inundated by several hundred replies requesting further information.

Owing partly to the help of such well-wishers as Dr Jehanbux Bagli, Hormusji Daruwalla and Dhunjishah Surti, a large number were able to emigrate, the majority settling in Toronto and Montreal. Earlier, a Jehangirji R. Paymaster had even induced the Canadian government to send an interviewer to Bombay to screen prospective immigrants. Twelve hundred people had responded to Paymaster's advertisement in *The Jam-e-Jamshed*, and a few hundred actually made the journey. But due to some misunderstanding, Paymaster (who later changed his surname to Medora) eventually earned more criticism than praise for his trouble.

Parsis might have gained a foothold in the country earlier, had the efforts of Sir Pherozshah Cursetji Sethna seen light. One of the

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most eminent Parsis to visit the country, he had worked for over 30 years with the Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada until he retired as the General Manager of the Company in India. He had discussed the emigration of Parsis with the Canadian Government, but the Second World War intervened; by the time it was over, India had gained her independence and immigration had become difficult. At one time, Sir Homi Mehta's son, Jalbhai, had bought 200 acres of land in Canada possibly with the idea of starting a business but returned to Bombay and sold the property off before anything came of it.

Academic prospects and the war brought a steady trickle of Parsis to Canada. Shiavak Nowroji Katrak, son of Nowroji Dadabhai Katrak, Chief Executive Engineer of the Bombay Improvement Trust, took degrees in dentistry from Toronto University in 1922 and returned to Bombay. Dara Dastur, Keikhushroo Barucha, Bomanshah Ghadiali and possibly Dorabji Wadia too, came to the same University prior to the establishment of the immigration quotas in 1953 and were among the first Parsis to

apply for landed immigrant status. All hold positions of esteem and are now Canadian citizens except for Ghadiali who emigrated to California.

The Second World War saw Lt. J. A. Moos of the Royal Canadian Navy stationed at Esquimalt, and in 1941 Rustamji D. Bana left Kobe, Japan, and arrived with his three sons in Vancouver as landed immigrants. Though they had come with a view to permanent settlement, the eldest son seeing active service in the Royal Canadian Air Force, Rustomji eventually emigrated to the U.S.A., became an architect and is now retired in San Francisco.

While past Parsi emigrants had always, upon establishing a settlement, made arrangements for the disposal of their dead, the present community in Canada seems less concerned with this matter. When Dhunjishah Surti took special leave from work to locate a suitable spot for a Zoroastrian burial ground, his considerable efforts went unheeded even though he managed to find one. As it stands, Vancouver and Montreal are the only cities offering such facilities. In the mid-60's at the time of peak-

migration of the community to Canada, when a far-sighted Iranian Zoroastrian offered \$50,000 towards the building of a fire-temple for Parsi Canadians, the immigrants were not prepared to accept his benevolence.

It takes time before a newly-arrived community can settle down, adjust itself to its alien habitat and re-establish its ethnic identity. A symposium held in 1975 in Toronto to discuss the future of the community in its new home was an indication that the community members were possibly entering the second phase of settlement—thinking of the future of their children and re-examining their cultural and religious heritage. Zoroastrian Associations have sprung up in British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec. They communicate with their members through newsletters containing current news, items of Parsi history and commentaries on the religion. Though religious sentiments are difficult to kindle in the less disciplined atmosphere which characterizes modern life, a concerted effort is made to see that important ceremonies are not completely forgotten. In Vancouver,

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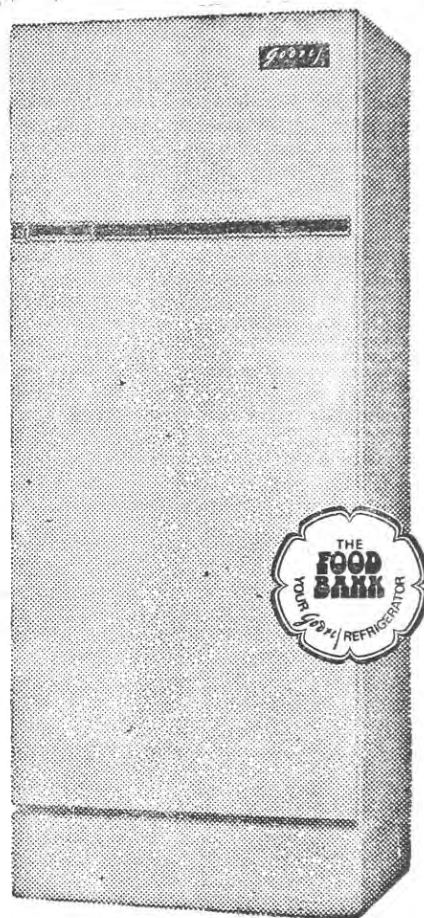
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burial grounds are visited faithfully during the Farverdegan, and on other days, prayers are offered. The Zoroastrian Association of Europe, Inc., in London undertakes to perform the *Muktad* ceremonies of those buried in the cemetery. A *Machi* is offered to the Iranshah Atash Behram in Udwarda once every year in the name of the Hama Anjuman of British Columbia. A memorial fund established by the Anjuman maintains a record of the deceased, and upon each death anniversary, provides a small contribution towards some deserving charity.

The community's charitable instincts have not languished. To assist the East Pakistan Relief Fund in 1970, the Quebec Parsis organized a dinner and dance and raised over \$600. The Vancouver organization has been running a book project for the past seven years and has so far sent over half a million books to schools, libraries and institutions in India. For the last two years, they have also run a project for the blind in India, in the name of deceased benefactors. Last year, in the name of the late Rustamji Alpawala, enough money was raised to establish five eye-camps in Uttar Pradesh through the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind. This year, the project is in memory of Dadabhai Pestonjee Wadia of the illustrious Wadia family.

Though the destiny of the Canadian community so far has been quite independent of other American Parsi groups, it seems that the activities of their sister communities across the border are finally going to catch up with them. The Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York, headed by Dr Erachshah Munshi and Dr Lovji Cama, with the donation of \$180,000 from Arbab Rustam Guiv of Iran, seems likely to have won the race to establish the first Zoroastrian House in that part of the world. On the other hand, Toronto tops the list when it comes to numerical superiority, with an 800-to-900-strong Parsi population, and also forms a central point between Montreal, Ottawa and New York. If the future of the community indeed lies in the New World, then it may still be Toronto and the Canadian community which can lay claim to a new Zoroastrian capital.

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Boman-Behram: 'Not merely trustees'

The Chairman of the Board

Mr Boman K. Boman-Behram assumed the chairmanship of the board of trustees of the Parsi Panchayat Funds and Properties, Bombay, on 31 July 1977. As chairman of that august body, he is also ex-officio president of the Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India, under whose auspices the Third World Zoroastrian Congress is to be held this January.

A lawyer by profession, Boman-Behram has served as a trustee of the Bombay Panchayat since 1961, and aside from his numerous community activities, is also a municipal councillor, a former member of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly and has been mayor of Bombay (1974-1975). In a break with tradition, Boman-Behram agreed to a formal interview with the press, probably the first chairman of the Panchayat to do so. He requested the questions be submitted to him three days prior to the interview and consented to the session being tape-recorded on condition he be shown a transcript before publication. In regard to two questions pertaining to his views on inter-community marriages and the ban on non-Parsis viewing the face of the dead after the gah sarna ceremony, he requested a 'caveat,' as he considered them 'controversial' subjects. Below, we carry extracts from the hour-long interview conducted on Oct. 8, at his home.

Parsiana: Mr Boman-Behram, you, Mr Jamshed Guzder and the other trustees of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat have all put in a lot of effort for the 3rd World Zoroastrian Congress. What would you like to see it achieve?

Boman-Behram: The basic purpose of the Congress is to get Parsis from different parts of the world together to exchange views, to appreciate problems peculiar to them due to their different environment. And primarily, to see that the Parsi community as a whole retains its identity as it has over the last 1,300 years.

Parsiana: What is your reaction to criticism at the three lakhs being spent on the Congress?

Boman-Behram: This is a surmise. We have yet to know the exact amount of expenditure required. But assuming two-and-a-half or three lakhs are required, is not the expenditure worthwhile over a gathering of such magnitude? The two and a half or three lakhs do not come from the Parsis of Bombay only. This *panchayat's* contribution is only Rs 25,000, the Surat Panchayat will contribute Rs 20,000 and since the other *anjumans* are not in a financial position to contribute much, the rest of the revenue will come from delegates' fees, patrons' fees etc.; and Parsis living abroad have also contributed. We are not spending trust money. We have a separate fund called General Fund No. 2. That fund is elastic and the trustees are empowered to spend out of that fund 'for the benefit of the community', that is the only stipulation.

Parsiana: Jamshed Guzder, your

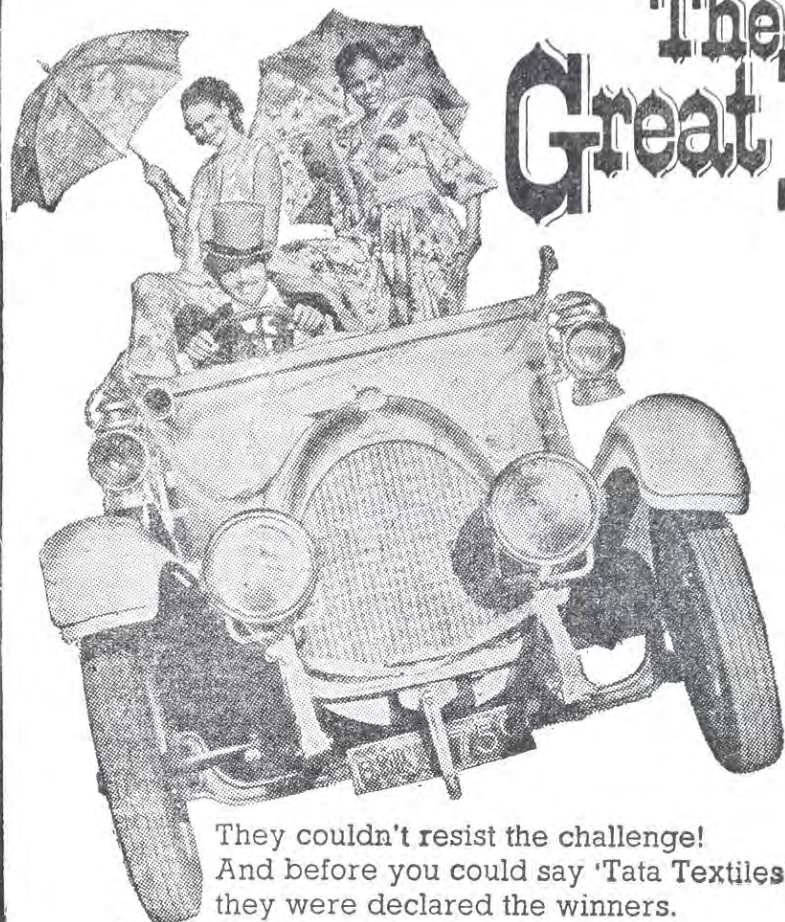
co-trustee, mentioned at the last meeting of the executive committee (of the Federation of the Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India) in Poona that when he was overseas, people asked, 'Is it going to be a Parsi Congress or a Zoroastrian Congress?'

Boman-Behram: No, we say it is a Zoroastrian Congress. Why should a Zoroastrian Congress, which is meant to get together Parsis from the world over, discuss problems peculiar only to this country?

Parsiana: But do you feel all this controversy is going to hamper the Congress?

Boman-Behram: Controversy about what? The only care to be taken is, which topic should be discussed and which avoided, so as not to unnecessarily hurt the feelings of the Parsis in Bombay. At the Poona meeting of the executive council of the Federation, we decided first, that no resolutions will be passed but there will be discussion. Second, that if there is any discussion that is likely to or which the chairman anticipates may create disorder or hurt the religious feelings of a particular section, then the chairman may stop the discussion. That is very fair.

Parsis residing abroad have their own peculiar problems. Their problem is that they want the community to retain its identity but at the same time they don't want to dwindle in numbers and they think that if they don't admit children of Parsi mothers and non-Parsi fathers the community will decrease. It may be a legitimate fear because their children or grand-children are bound to marry out of the community. They feel the only sal-



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vation is to admit children of Parsi mothers and non-Parsi fathers into the fold; which of course is impossible in India. We cannot do it.

Parsiana: Would you tell them to go their own way?

Boman-Behram: We have no control over them nor can we dictate to them. We can give them guidance; but if they think it is for their benefit to do that, we can't prevent them; although we may advise them against it. And we do advise against it.

Parsiana: What has happened to the referendum on this issue of children of Parsi women marrying outside the community suggested at the Bombay executive council meeting of the Federation?

Boman-Behram: We made a beginning, but we couldn't manage it with the organization of the Congress which was coming too close, so we have postponed it for the time being. We have to engage a large body of workers to go from door to door and explain because it is no use taking signatures only, you have to explain the issue. At the appropriate time we shall take it up again.

Parsiana: Suppose the referendum favoured the children of Parsi women marrying out coming into the community, what would be the next step? Does it mean you would move the legislature or would you hold a trial case? Or would it just stop over there?

Boman-Behram: The Panchayat would have to consider what to do. Instead of a referendum we may call a *samast anjuman* meeting again, that is also a referendum.

Parsiana: What does the *samast anjuman* comprise of?

Boman-Behram: The general body of the community. Anyone can be present there. They can express their opinion and then resolutions are passed.

Parsiana: But why have these *samast anjuman* meetings not been held since 1933?

Boman-Behram: There was no occasion for it. In 1933, these controversies were very acute. After '33 or '34, and particularly after independence, these controversies practically died down but have been revived recently.

Parsiana: How do you see the Federation (of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India) serving the community?

Boman-Behram: One advantage of the Federation is that it brings together Parsis from all corners of the country. We exchange views, we come to know each other better and it makes for a certain amount of cohesion in the Parsi community, although views may differ. When the Federation develops into a strong organisation by itself, then it can take on other functions.

Parsiana: Do you feel it is a valid

The Federation is still not an apex body for the community.

The Parsi Panchayat of Bombay still remains the apex body.

criticism that the Federation does not have any staff and that hampers its functioning or do you feel that it is not required at present?

Boman-Behram: What can the Federation do? After all, the burden of organization is carried by the Bombay Panchayat because the other associations do not have adequate staff or adequate funds. So we give the service of our staff, we spend the monies, we give them our office premises etc; so I don't know what the criticism amounts to really.

Parsiana: Do you feel that the Federation should start building up a fund of its own?

Boman-Behram: They should, if it is to survive. There is a small fund already collected but it is very small.

Parsiana: Is the Federation too young?

Boman-Behram: Perhaps, I cannot say what will happen with maturity. Other *anjumans* in India still look to the Bombay Panchayat for advice and assistance.

Parsiana: But there is no legal sanction to the leadership of the Bombay Panchayat?

Boman-Behram: Yes, it is an offshoot of historical tradition. Historically, we are not merely

trustees but also the leaders of the community. The Parsis of Bombay as well as other parts of India look to the Bombay Parsi Panchayat for guidance. The Federation is still not an apex body for the community. The Parsi Panchayat of Bombay still remains the apex body.

Parsiana: How do you envision the role of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat in the Parsi community?

Boman-Behram: I make bold to say that the panchayat is the central social welfare organization of the Parsi community all over India; it has a long history behind it. Its role is to serve the community in all possible ways.

Parsiana: Then, would you say that the trustees are the conscience keepers of the community?

Boman-Behram: Yes, I do say so.

Parsiana: Does that mean that the trustees should lay down norms for the community?

Boman-Behram: Yes, they can lay down norms so far as social welfare is concerned. But the panchayat has been careful not to interfere in religious questions, that is really the province of the *athornans* (priests).

Parsiana: Who, do you feel, is the right person to be a trustee?

Boman-Behram: First of all, he should have a good family background; that is essential. He must also be representative of the opinions and thinking of the community; or the majority of the Parsis at least. There may be a few reformists and all that, but we can't go by their extremist views. The Bombay Panchayat has always reflected the feelings and opinions of the bulk of the community.

Parsiana: What should a trustee contribute to the panchayat?

Boman-Behram: He gives his service; there are about 30-39 departments and sections of the panchayat; every trustee manages about four or five of them. To be a trustee is an honour; but the primary objective is service.

Parsiana: Should more power be delegated to the administrative wing of the panchayat so that a trustee is not tied down in the panchayat office every day? Or what about a 'managing trustee'?

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Boman-Behram: There cannot be a 'managing trustee'; all seven trustees are equally responsible for every act of theirs. As far as the administration is concerned, no doubt it has grown to large dimensions, but we cannot leave it all to the staff. Some years ago it was the practice to leave administrative matters to the secretaries; but not so now. Every trustee has one department whose administration he looks into. A lot of time does go into administrative work but we also discuss general problems. Now we have decided that one meeting every month or two will be devoted solely to discussing general problems of the community and not administrative matters only.

Parsiana: What sort of general problems?

Boman-Behram: Say, the reform of the Parsi law of marriage and divorce or registration of *navjotes* or the economic condition of the community. These problems affect the community as a whole.

Parsiana: Cannot the panchayat function as a company, with a board of directors?

Boman-Behram: No, no, it cannot. There is always a sharp distinction between a trustee and a director.

Parsiana: Do you feel the present system for the election of the trustees of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat is adequate and that it serves as a sufficient mechanism for change in leadership?

Boman-Behram: What do you mean by an adequate system? Do you mean there should be adult franchise for the election of a trustee or that there should be a wider franchise in the existing system, which provides for election through an electoral college? The E Register of elective bodies whom the community elects and the F register of donors, together, elect the trustees. This system is also broadening. We asked the court to amend the scheme in such a way that after every seven years when the election of the E register is held, there should be parity between the E Register and F Register. At the end of seven years at the next general election, eligibility to the F register will be on merit. If you are going to introduce adult franchise, then be prepared for disaster because you do not know what sort of a person will be elected as

a trustee. When you leave it to adult franchise, even a table-thumper can be elected as a trustee.

Parsiana: But do you feel it is right that a donor can get a vote by paying Rs 5,000?

Boman-Behram: That is laid down by a High Court judgement. The panchayat contested it at one stage, but the High Court upheld it. Besides it is one way of getting funds for the panchayat.

Parsiana: Do you feel 10 years for the term of a trustee is too long, or is it too short?

Boman-Behram: It's fair enough; it should be 10 years. A change of trustees every five years would not be advisable. Formerly, when trustees were elected for life, it was felt to be too long so the scheme

If you are going to introduce adult franchise, then be prepared for disaster because you do not know what sort of a person will be elected as a trustee.

was amended and it was felt 10 years would be an adequate period for a trustee to grasp the problems of the community and to be of service to the community.

Parsiana: How many terms, then, should a trustee serve?

Boman-Behram: So long as he is fit and useful; the late Lady Jehangir, served for 30 years.

Parsiana: Many say that the community is not aware of what the panchayat is doing.

Boman-Behram: I think that criticism is partly correct; so far, the panchayat has kept to itself. There is no reason why the panchayat should not publicize its activities. The first press conference was held in Lady Jehangir's time; I intended to hold a press conference at least once in three months and inform the Parsi press what we are doing. I feel it is very necessary.

Parsiana: Do you feel that the Parsi press has been fair to the panchayat?

Boman-Behram: On the whole, no. Certain papers have been very unfair to the panchayat. Most of the criticism levelled against the panchayat is ill-informed. Criticism for the sake of criticism without offering any constructive suggestion has a reaction which is just the opposite to what is intended. Formerly, I paid attention to criticism to get something out of it, but now, I don't care to read it. Why should I?

Parsiana: Do you feel this is because press conferences have not been held?

Boman-Behram: That may be one factor; I agree that the panchayat so far has hidden its light under a bushel which it should not have done in this age of publicity. We are going to remedy it, but if the Parsi press continues to be perverse, despite press conferences, and still goes on criticising us, in spite of facts being placed before them, then, I hope to publish a periodical newsletter on behalf of the panchayat which will give the facts to the community.

Parsiana: But there is also the criticism that the panchayat is a glorified real estate agency and much of its time is spent looking after housing?

Boman-Behram: That is not quite correct. Housing is a very acute problem. We have got nearly 4,000 on the waiting list. But for the panchayat today, the Parsis would have found it very hard to obtain housing. The late Lady Jehangir created a special category of priority for housing for engaged couples. There are about 470 to 480 couples waiting. Naturally, the housing problem and the administrative matters connected with it, engage much of our attention.

Parsiana: People often say that Parsis can't get married because of accommodation. But in other communities people manage to marry and have children, and their numbers are not dwindling.

Boman-Behram: Yes, but we have cultivated a higher standard of living. In other communities they may live in a chawl or eight to 10 in a room. Parsis cannot do that because we have achieved a certain standard and we try to maintain it. We have 20 colonies, including the five Wadia bays, where we house about 20,000

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Parsis and every three or five years we expand our colonies. But we lack funds so now we go in for owner-ship buildings.

Parsiana: Do you think there is any chance of raising funds to build public housing in Bombay?

Boman-Behram: We have established a building construction fund and we get contributions to it. Other trusts also contribute handsomely. But the panchayat has no liquid funds to raise buildings. Unless we have a crash programme for housing with the community as a whole, participating in it, this problem will never be solved. As chairman of the panchayat I intend to approach personally every Parsi trust with a begging bowl and ask them to contribute because there are quite a few who have housing as

The Panchayat, has hid its light under a bushel, which it should not have done in this age of publicity.

their object but they have not come forward so far.

Parsiana: Many criticize the *panchayat*, '*eloko pasey carodo rupia che*' (they have millions of rupees) but they just sit on it.

Boman-Behram: Our liquid assets are ear-marked; we can't touch them. We can't apply the *cy pres* (change of use) to them because the objects of the funds are being accomplished at present. About 28 years ago the trustees of the panchayat thought of converting the *gahambar* funds, when *gahambars* could not be held because of rationing. They applied to the court for *cy pres* to use the funds for other objects. The court gave a *cy pres* for seven years only. It said that should rationing be removed and grains be available again, the panchayat would have to carry out the intention of the founder and have *gahambars*. After seven years when rationing had not been removed, the panchayat approached the court again and the *cy pres* was given for another seven years. When approached for the fourth time, that is, after 28 years, the court finally gave a permanent ruling that the trust could be

changed. People talk glibly of converting these funds by applying the *cy pres* doctrine but it is not so easy to do that.

Parsiana: How many tenements do you think the panchayat could build in the next decade or so?

Boman-Behram: That will depend on what funds we command. Panthaki Baug at Andheri is developing very fast. The next question is of land. Where shall we get land from? We are also trying to develop the outlying portions of *doongerwadi* (the Towers of Silence) for the lower classes. If that scheme materializes and if funds are available, there is enough land on the outskirts of *doongerwadi* to construct at least 500 tenements.

Parsiana: Is this land adjacent to or on the outskirts of *doongerwadi*?

Boman-Behram: On the outskirts, very far away from the Towers of Silence. Plans are underway and we have asked for exemption from the relevant authority.

Parsiana: How acute, do you think, is the employment problem in the community?

Boman-Behram: The Parsi community is gradually sliding into poverty. The notion that the Parsi community is a rich community as held by others, is a wrong notion.

Parsiana: What do you feel are the main reasons for that?

Boman-Behram: Formerly, we were a business community, today, we are not. Perhaps it may be due to competition from other communities or economic changes in the country, and so, we are practically left out. The panchayat wants Parsis to take to small scale industries. There are facilities for it. But Parsis must come forward, which they don't. There are many industrial estates along Chembur or Saki Naka, and in hardly any will you find a Parsi; you can count them on your fingers, as compared to what we were before.

Parsiana: But is the reason for that because we have lost our religious faith or because we lost our work ethic?

Boman-Behram: I am really not clear why this decline has come about, but the sooner the Parsis realize it and do something about it, the better; otherwise, our community will suffer economically.

Parsiana: When and how did your involvement with the community start?

Boman-Behram: In 1938. I was then residing in Mahim, and the Parsis there thought they should have an association. My involvement started with the Mahim association.

Parsiana: If someone said, 'Mr Boman-Behram, how could I help the panchayat?' what would you advise?

Boman-Behram: There are a lot of avenues for social service in our colonies. We lack social workers.

Parsiana: Even someone who can put in a few hours?

Boman-Behram: Yes, we would welcome it.

Parsiana: The *panchayat* would be able to absorb them?

Boman-Behram: Yes, we want them. People who are so inclined should approach any of the Panchayat trustees.

Parsiana: What do you see happening to the community 25 years from now?

Boman-Behram: I believe the community still has enough vitality to survive. Only, it has not got the incentives which it had about 50 or 75 years ago. Under the British regime we had much scope. Today, we are afraid of competition from other communities. Parsis should shed their superiority complex. If you render a service to your sister communities, they will fall on your neck. I am not ashamed of telling you that I have even sat down and taken my meals with *zoppadpatis* (slum dwellers). That is what attracts the sister communities to yourself. Our forefathers mingled with the sister communities, they did business with them, were partners with them and they participated in their activities. Today, if Parsis choose to keep to themselves as a closed community we shall not survive.

Parsiana: But what about fire temples where admission is to Parsis only?

Boman-Behram: That is a different question. I am only talking of public life, that Parsis should come out more to participate in public life and rub shoulders with the sister communities, that is the only way of surviving.

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What's Cooking?

by Ruzbeh Antia and Shirin Patel

From the banana leaves and the fluorescent aerated drinks, to the pyjama-clad servers sloshing food onto the leaves and making their final rounds with basins of warm water and liquid soap in plastic salt cellars, the *lagan nu bhonu* (wedding meal) completes the glamour of a *baug* marriage or *navjote*. As indispensable to every such occasion as the officiating priest, is the caterer who organizes the traditional feast, often, for over a thousand people, and behind the lavish spread that finds its way to the endless ranks of tables, lies a long day of hard work for as many as 50 to 90 people.

The day at the *baug* (enclosures specially constructed for weddings and *navjotes*) begins at six in the morning, 'because clients insist that we send them *sev dahi* (fried sweet vermicelli and curds) for breakfast,' says Adi Pavri, one of the popular caterers of Bombay. As supplies start rolling in from the wholesalers, women chop vegetables, clean fish, pound and grind massive quantities of *masala* (spices), the special butcher beheads the chickens and fish, cuts the meat, and the *pharmaswala* (*chapati*-maker) kneads and rolls out the dough and bakes the *chapatis*. In a dark, smoky kitchen with wood fires and iron tripods ranged along the walls, the chief cook and his assistants set to work. In the days of plentiful labour, there were separate, specialist cooks per dish, but now the chief cook supervises all the cooking while the actual mixing, frying and shifting of vessels is done by eight to 10 assistants. The kitchen can get so hot and suffocating that men faint or collapse from the effort and exhaustion of lifting the huge *manvars* (utensils for cooking *pulao*) *patias* and *baghanas* (utensils for cooking fish and chicken) each of which can hold from 150 to 200 pieces of fish or chicken. 'It is obviously not the sort of work a woman can do,' emphasizes Naoroji Patel, another popular caterer. However, the

caterers have no choice but to continue using the primitive wood fires because none of the *baug* kitchens is supplied with cooking gas and even if they were, no gas ring would be large enough to accommodate the huge vessels.

Every vessel of food that leaves the kitchen is tasted by the

caterer or his manager; one may have less salt, another may be too spicy and many require to be tempered with sugar or lime juice, while a third may have too much salt which may sometimes be rectified by the addition of ordinary washing bricks to suck up the excess saltiness. Dishes like *mughlai* chicken or *pulao* (special rice) which contains curds are always in danger of spoiling, particularly in summer. By noon, all the vessels are cooling under fans and trays of food are readied to be sent to the homes of the clients, their relatives and friends.

'People like wedding food because it is different from what they eat at home,' says Ms Freni Godiwala, who with her husband, Rohinton, caters for about 200 occasions a year in Bombay. 'Even when the same dishes are cooked at home they taste quite different,' explains Nariman Wadia who has been in the business for over 40 years. The secret lies, both, in bulk cooking and in the time-honoured recipes that have come down by word of mouth. However, the majority of people go to a wedding expecting to eat the typical *lagan*



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nu *bhonu*, complete with pickle, *chapatis*, wafers, *lagan nu custard* (baked custard) or *murabba* (preserve) and ice cream or *kulfi* (rich Indian ice cream) and feel cheated if something different is dished up instead.

'People don't want to try anything new,' points out Pavri, 'besides, we often don't have the facilities.' Nevertheless, many caterers have complied with unusual requests, from corn soup and fried rice to chicken with mayonnaise and baked fish soufflé. Variations on the lunch menu or *sadhra nu bhonu* are even rarer; *sev* and *dahi*, *sali boti* (fried, grated potato in meat gravy), and *dhandar* (plain white rice with lentil *puree*) with

patient or the weight-watcher. Vegetarians too, have to be considered; they have a choice of Parsi-style vegetarian fare or a Hindu *thali* (meal served in a round metal tray). 'What is most infuriating is when someone specifically asks for vegetarian or boiled food and then coolly eats the other food too!' complains Ms Godiwala.

The meal always begins with fish, which is considered auspicious and which can be prepared in four or five ways. *Saas ni macchi* (fish in white, spiced sauce) is the traditional Parsi favourite, while *patra ni macchi* (steamed fish with green chilli chutney wrapped in banana leaves) enjoys the edge with other communities. Other varieties are

the kitchen is at the disposal of the client who can have it sent to friends and relatives, to a sanatorium or even to *doongewadi* (the Towers of Silence, i.e. the small community who live there). The leftovers on the banana leaves are the property of the sweeper of the *baug* who sells them to the poor lined up outside, who pay anything from Rs 2 to Rs 5 (for particularly scrumptious residues) for a set of 25 *patras* (leaves). Any raw material left over is kept in cold storage and used the next day.

The secret of the caterer's success lies in the calculation of supplies. To plan so that there is neither great wastage nor an embarrassing shortfall, besides making sufficient provision for unexpected guests, calls for an art akin to jugglery which most caterers have mastered so well that at 87, Kaikushroo Bhoot, the doyen of the caterers, claims that given the number of guests and the menu, he can work out all the supplies needed down to the last cashew nut. If the final order is for 300 people, caterers normally provide 450 pieces of chicken, 375 pieces of fish, 2 eggs per person and 24 kilos of *pulao* on the assumption that each person will have a second helping of one of the dishes. In summer the demand for fish is greater whereas in winter, coinciding with the peak season for weddings and *navjotes*, people tend to eat more chicken. However, raw ingredients are kept ready at hand stacked on ice, in case more than the expected number of guests



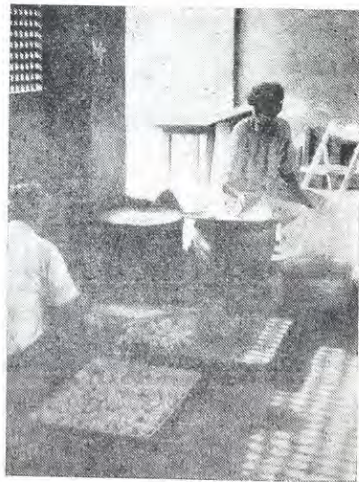
Stirring the pot of dar

fish *patyo* (fish in spiced tomato gravy) is standard fare, whether the meal is served after a wedding, or more often, a *navjote*, in the morning, or sent home for the family.

The nature of the food has largely been dictated by the circumstances in which it is served. The custom of starting the repast with potato wafers, for instance, grew up in the days when wine and spirits accompanied the meals; prohibition has since dried up the liquor but the wafers remain. The banana leaf originally borrowed from other Indian communities, eliminates breakage and washing problems, though it is also responsible for the heavily oil-based food, as a too thin gravy would be uncontrollable on the flat, smooth leaf and create messy problems. Caterers have to make provision too for special diets for the heart

fish *vindaloo* (heavily spiced fish) or fried fish fillets for those who like it plain. Popular chicken dishes are roast chicken with potatoes or *sali*, *margi na farcha* (fried chicken), Mughlai chicken, Chicken Rashida and the newly introduced stuffed spring chicken. The meal is brought to a close with *pulao* served with the special pungent Parsi *dar*. Variations on this menu are rare; *kid gos* (the soft meat of a goat weighing less than seven kilograms) is sometimes substituted for chicken, others may prefer curry rice to *pulao*, while the more fastidious may add *thal na eda* (fried eggs with vegetables) or *bharuchi akuri* (spiced scrambled egg) to the basic fare. The latest entrant is Chinese *akuri*, ordinary *akuri* sprinkled with baked egg yolks.

In spite of precautions, wastage is inevitable. The food left over in



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arrive. But food cooked a second time does not always have the same flavour or taste as the original, due to the stop-gap measures resorted to. 'When another caterer, who has a surplus, sends *patra ni macchi* we simply wash off the chutney and add the fish to the *saas* (sauce) that we have prepared,' explains Patel. 'But, of course, people must realise that it was their fault, in the first place, for not giving the correct order.'

The metier does not entail hard work and calculations only. 'A lot of psychology is involved, because we have to deal with all sorts of people,' says Ms Godiwala. Almost all caterers have had to handle clients who are slow to pay, or have come across people smuggling home the odd *patra ni macchi* or cutlets, but normally turn a blind eye to it because it is, perhaps, next day's breakfast.

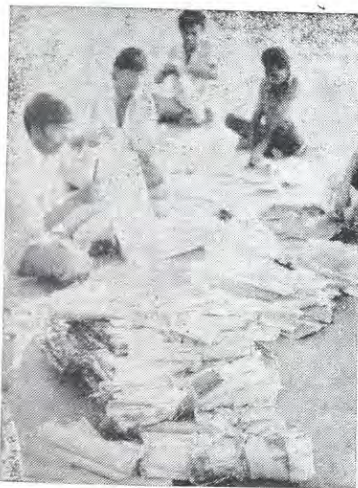
The business is by its very nature, seasonal and sporadic. Profits depend on the size of the gathering, the regularity of orders, prevailing market prices and avail-

to see whether the labourers have come, otherwise we have to go in search for other people,' laments Patel. Though *baug* kitchens still carry an 'Entry for Parsis only' sign, as a vestige of days when labour was cheap, plentiful and Parsi, the majority of labourers and servers today are Lalias, Dubras and Mohammedans, while the butlers (pronounced 'boot-lair' in the profession), who dispense drinks and ice, are Christians. The last three Parsi cooks in the trade today are Minoo Sahiyar, Motu Tampal and Fram Surti, but Parsi servers are almost non-existent, having drifted to more permanent

war, when less than 50 could be served. The guest control order is still in force: rice can only be served at marriages and funerals to only 100 people and at other functions, to 50, but thanks to the combined ingenuity of the caterers and their clients, one finds at any wedding or *navjote* today, hundreds tucking in mammoth quantities of *pulao* oblivious of any restrictions.

Though all the caterers agree that the origin of the species goes far back into antiquity, no one has a precise idea of how, why and when the business started. The earliest known caterer was probably Hormusji Baria who used to cook the food at his house and then send it out. Ms Poruchisti Pavri was, perhaps, the only woman ever to venture single-handed into the line. She ran the family business after the death of her husband, Nusserwanji Pavri, looking personally to every detail.

The first caterers were probably called in by the rich for *navjotes* and weddings, the reception being held quite often on the ramparts of the old Bombay fort or in their



Trimming the banana leaves

ability of raw materials, transport and labour. Strikes may disrupt supplies or out-of-stock ingredients may go underground. The shortage of banana leaves in winter sends the price shooting up to Rs 25 for 100, and after every occasion, at least two dozen glasses are broken and over a dozen pieces of cutlery are found missing. Labour shortage can be so acute that 'the first thing we have to do when we go to the *baug* in the morning is



Grinding the masala

jobs in *agiaries* or mills. Pavri thinks that Parsis seem to find this kind of work very degrading while Wadia points out that though some of the poor Parsis who come to *baugs* to beg would be only too willing to work, they cannot manage it. Not only is the work hard, it is also badly paid. The head cook and the managers receive the highest wages, at Rs 50 a day, while the servers are the lowest paid with Rs 3.50 a day, a fact which caterers try to explain away by pointing out that they receive tips and are given sets of clothes. They reportedly gamble, drink, and pilfer, and caterers have reportedly decided to enlist security officers to maintain order.

Another detriment is the government-imposed restrictions, first introduced during the second world



Polishing the silver

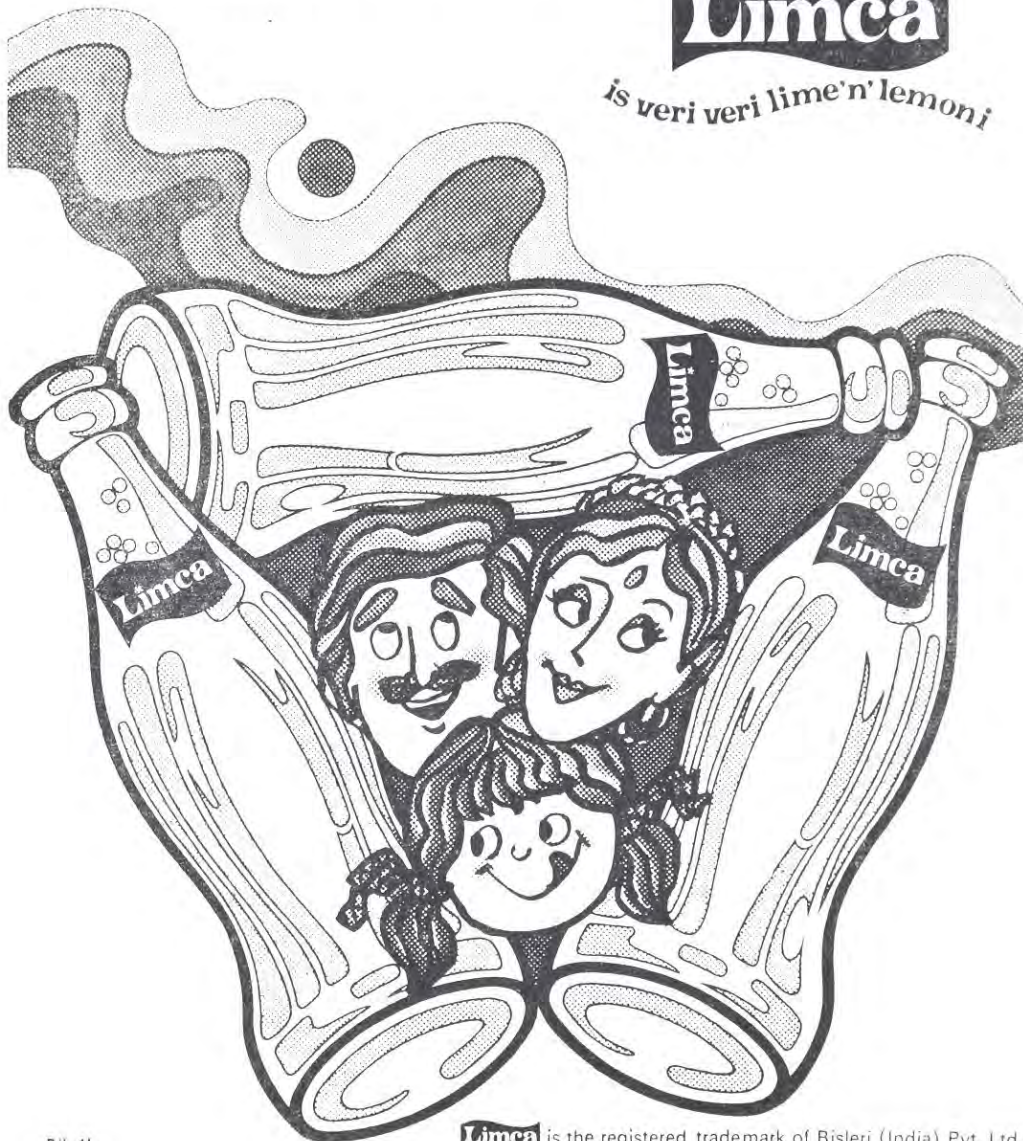
own bungalows, with the place lit up with oil lamps. The poor and the middle-class, who lived mainly in *mohallas* (quarters), normally built a *mandap* (pavillion) on the open space outside and held the celebration there. 'Big gatherings were rare in those days,' Bhoot says; 'perhaps the average number was 100-150. Only the very rich called over 500 people and a thousand was considered a very great thing.' It was only with the growth

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of the city and small apartments, that *baugs* came into being and the middle-class, following the example of the rich, began calling in the caterer. The weddings of yesterday were altogether a different kettle of fish. The guests rolled up in horse-drawn victorias and a deputy of the host stood at the door to pay the fare. Aerated drinks were rare, a *tamri* (pot) of water and a *katli* (small pitcher) made the rounds of the gathering several times before the bar was declared open with 'Bar par chalo ji (Come to the bar).' Alcohol was served again with the main meal, and even the *bhonas* sent home were accompanied by a bottle of Scotch. Initially, the menu had been extremely simple, only fish and eggs with rice and *dar*. But in the

drawn cart) which had to pay a *khatara* tax of a rupee to enter the *baug*. The caterer also had to pay a *khuta* pass to set up the stage. The *khuta* was the central pole of the stage. The charge was not usually per *patra* but according to the charge and expenses incurred. When Nusserwanji Pavri catered, the bills usually came to at least Rs 7 to 8 per person.

The normal three-course meal now costs from Rs 22 to Rs 35, if a speciality, like stuffed chicken, is ordered. However, the profit can be as low as 25 or 50p per *patru* (leaf) and is mainly dependent on the number of *patras* ordered; which is why caterers are reluctant to accept orders for small functions. 'If I have a big function to cater for, then I take orders for small parties,' says Godiwala. 'Cooking for small numbers is very expensive,' says Patel, 'as we have to hire a *baug* in which to do the cooking.' Pavri says that he would normally insist on a minimum of 200 people to take on the catering. Of course, most caterers also provide the food for the pre-marriage ceremonies, where the numbers involved are much smaller.

The caterers have an association, but there seem to have been no constructive steps taken to regulate competition or to fix tariffs. The activities of the association seem to be almost exclusively social, with a *jashan* every year and a trip to Udvada, though they hold meetings to discuss their problems.

With time, the menu will become more restricted, because of rising

costs, Wadia feels. Patel pleads that the Parsis should seriously consider curtailing the number of dishes because, as it is, there is a lot of wastage. But Godiwala feels that as long as the present set-up continues, people will feel compelled to have three courses to save face. But the caterers are agreed that as time goes by, business will get more difficult. 'I feel that within the next few years non-Parsis will invade this business too,' says Patel, who cites a couple of concrete instances where the food was provided at the *baug* by two well-known Muslim restaurants. 'Of course these people are not allowed to use the kitchens of the *baug*, but then most of them have their own commercial kitchens.' But, perhaps, this could also lead to a movement in the reverse direction; Parsi caterers taking up the catering for non-Parsi functions. A start was made years ago, with Bhoot, who claimed to have catered, among other things, for cricket matches and the All-India Congress session, in 1907 at Surat. Though caterers have done this on occasion, most of them agree that such assignments are very rare.

It is a business which does not require much initial capital investment. 'It is easy to get things cheaply on hire till one has made enough to begin investing in the necessary equipment,' Pavri explains. But it is a hard life: long hours of work personally supervising at the *baug* from early morning till late at night, often, for several consecutive days. 'There is never a loss,' says Godiwala 'though sometimes, we may have to write off an entire occasion.'

Marriages outside the community pose another problem. Several people who marry out, often have receptions where they serve Parsi-style food. But the *baugs* are sticky about the matter. They do not let the premises unless both parties are Parsis, and in some cases like Albless Baug, the marriage too has to be held there—one cannot merely have a reception there and tie the knot elsewhere. However, only about five per cent of the community's functions are held in five-star hotels or elsewhere and most caterers did not seem to think that the Crystal Room syndrome made any appreciable dent in the business. As Godiwala put it, '*Vadi ni maja te vadi maj chhe* (You can't have the fun of a *baug* wedding/navjote elsewhere).'



Testing for taste

'20's and '30's, the heyday of catering, the feasts became increasingly more lavish, with two types of fish: fried and *saas*, the famous *lagan nu* stew, eggs, custard or almond pudding, rice and *dar*, plus kid and chicken, rounded off with *kulfi*—and all this for Rs 2.50.

Reminiscing about the good old days, Bhoot said, 'Things were so cheap then. A 100 eggs cost Rs 2, chicken was Rs 6 a dozen and a *kudi* of fish (22) cost only Rs 2.' Whenever a caterer went to a client's house, there was *sagan* (ceremonial greeting) and he was always given some *pehranni* (gift of money). In those days, the caterer looked to everything, says Wadia, from supplying the food and chairs to setting up the stage. All the equipment was brought to the *baug* in a *khatara* (a bullock-



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How much do you know about your social, cultural, religious and economic heritage? Most Parsis are brought up on myths which they continue to believe till the *dokhma*. To help readers gauge the extent of their knowledge and also to keep them informed and enriched, *Parsiana* continues the Z-Quiz on behalf of the sponsor of The Lost Generation Essay Competition. The entry with the highest number of correct answers will receive Rs 75, the next, Rs 50 and the third, Rs 25. In case of a tie, the amount will be split among the winners.

Send your replies to The Editor, Z-Quiz, c/o *Parsiana*, G.P.O. Box 892, Bombay 400 001 by 15th February. Answers will be published in the next issue.



1. How many kinds of fire are used to consecrate an Atash Bahram fire?
2. Who was the first Indian to be knighted?
3. What is the Denkart?
4. Who is the Chief of Staff of the Indian Navy?
5. What are the names of the Amesha Spentas?
6. Who were the three Indian M.P.'s at Westminster?
7. What is the Dil no Kalso?
8. What is the Nirang ceremony?
9. Who is the president of the Federation of Zoroastrian Anjumans of India?
10. Which dynasty did King Jamshid belong to?

Z-Quiz 2 (*Parsiana*, Aug.-Sep. '77) failed to receive an entry with all correct answers. Ms Thrity Keeka and Bahman S. Surti, who both submitted nine correct solutions, receive Rs 37.50 each; Ms Katie F. Seervai and K. D. Chergeman receive Rs 25 each and Ms Yasmeen Nazir and A. K. Kathawalla receive Rs 12.50 each. Runners-up will receive a copy of Piloo Nanavutty's, *Fravarane* (I believe) gifted by the Parsi Zoroastrian Association of Calcutta. Below are solutions to Z-Quiz 3 (*Parsiana*, Oct.-Nov. '77):

1. Which Zoroastrian priest was summoned to the court of the Moghul emperor, Akbar?

Dasturji Meherji Rana; who was made high priest of Navsari for having represented the Parsis at the religious discourses held at Fatehpur Sikri from 1576 to 1579, in which representatives of various religions took part.

2. What is the E register?

Popularly known as the *So-nu-Mandal* (guild of 100), the E register consists of representatives elected by the other three registers of voters

(those who have donated Rs 500 and more, university graduates and any Parsi above the age of 21), and which along with the F register of donors (those who have donated Rs 5,000 or more), which it should equal in number, comprises the electoral college which can elect a trustee of the Parsi Panchayat of Bombay.

3. Who has written the longest piano piece ever?

Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji (born 1892); who has also given the only public performance, lasting 2½ hrs of his composition, *Opus Clavibambalisticum*—the longest non-repetitious piece for piano.

4. How many parts are there to the Parsi marriage ceremony?

Three. The initial ceremonies: 'tying the marriage knot', *Hathevaro* (hand fastening) and the couple throwing rice at each other. The religious part: conducted by two priests solemnizing the bond. The concluding benediction, *Ashirwad*.

5. Who is the Parsi mentioned in Melville's *Moby Dick*?

Fedallah (sic); who is described as 'a fire-worshipping Parsi'.

6. What is the Vendidad?

From the Avestan '*Vidaevadatta*' (the Law against the Daevas), the *Vendidad* is a liturgy comprising religious, sanitary and social codes. It is also the name of the nocturnal ceremony of the ritual of its 22 *fargersds* (chapters).

7. Who won the 1975 Booker prize for fiction?

Ruth Pravar Jhabhwala; for her novel, *Heat and Dust*.

8. How many strands of wool are there in a kusti?

72; which may represent the 72 chapters of *Yasna*.

9. Which Parsi is 'honoured' in Madame Tussaud's Waxworks in London?

'Buck Ruxton' (Dr Bukhtyar Rustomji Ratanji Hakim); hanged on 12 May 1936 for the murder of Isabella Ruxton (nee Kerr) and Mary Rogerson, whose dismembered bodies he disposed of in newspaper-wrapped parcels into a small tributary of the River Annan.

10. Who were the parents of the hero Rustom in the Shah Nameh?

Rudabeh and Zal.

The Theory, Function and Future of the Zoroastrian Priesthood

by Cyrus R. Pangborn

Professor Cyrus Pangborn is chairman, both, of the Department of Religion at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, and of the Department of Religion of its affiliate, Douglass College. When he recently visited India, for research on a book on Zoroastrianism in the world today, Pangborn delivered the lecture, 'The Theory, Function and Future of the Zoroastrian Priesthood', on the occasion of the 147th birth anniversary of the late K. R. Cama on 18th November, under the auspices of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute. An abridged and edited version of the talk is reprinted below, while the full text will be published later in the Institute's journal.

It is institutions that give us the clearest visible clues to the nature of a religion. Fire and its veneration, fire-temples, and the priesthood are three of Zoroastrianism's oldest institutions. It is to priesthood, and its future, that Zoroastrians today are giving a great deal of anxious thought, but with considerable ambivalence. They know, on the one hand, that no worthwhile structure, such as religion, can ultimately survive without professional leadership and, on the other hand, that their own priesthood is far too limited in its capacities to be really professional to give the leadership essential to survival.

Both, the priesthood and the ritual use of fire, antedated Zoroaster in ancient Iran and the *Gathas* strongly suggest he was a priest by profession. Though he agreed that there should be prayers, praises and invocation spoken with right intent, he found sacrifices inordinate and wasteful and quarreled with much of the contemporary understanding of religion when he became a prophet.

Unfortunately, when the Magi assumed leadership of Zoroastrianism, they emphasized precisely what Zoroaster had not — the accurate repetition of texts addressing God, and the archaic objective of drawing His power down to earth. They gave much of the shape to the priestly vocation that is still associated with the religion today.

The Hereditary Principle

Occupations in virtually all early traditionalist societies were inherited. The Magi were a hereditary priestly class of the Medes, and their assuming leadership of

the religion after Zoroaster resulted in making the Zoroastrian priesthood hereditary from then on.

The advantages of the hereditary principle are that it may constantly replenish the ranks of the priests and thus maintain a stable supply. Also, growing up in a priestly family may automatically educate young candidates in many of the requirements and taboos of the vocation; while exclusivism lends, as reward for undergoing arduous training, an aura of respectability, prestige and authority to the vocation.

But, the hereditary principle has the disadvantage of being notoriously unable to guarantee the best available candidates. Automatic access to the profession may make the vocation more attractive to the least able of priestly sons, and the laity would lose respect for, both, the vocation and its practitioners.

Training

Training for a profession which demands learning by rote and much time and effort spent on memory

The hereditary principle has the disadvantage of being notoriously unable to guarantee the best available candidate.

work, normally begins early in life: the child is instructed daily by his father or another priest or with other students by several priests at a *madressa* (seminary). Though the study of 'sacred' languages is part of the training, the emphasis is on reciting after a priest exactly what he recites of a liturgy and then practising it and the actions that go with it till both are known letter-perfect. This does not stimulate curiosity, imaginative reflection nor critical judgement, besides which, the training is completed before the student is old enough to use his mind in such ways.

This type of training has advantages if the concept of religion and priest is very traditional. Liturgy, in ancient times, was a formula for establishing connection with deities who would be prompted, upon hearing it, to place their powers at the service of the reciter — something like having the right equipment for making a long-distance telephone call: if one

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knows the formulas, the calls go through; if one does not know them, the 'line goes dead'.

In the modern urban communities where the majority of Zoroastrians reside, the priest trained thus is conspicuous for not possessing the educated intellect so characteristic of many of the laity. He may be respected in his role as priest but outside that role he is regarded as uneducated and socially stunted. Some years ago, the M. F. Cama Athornan Institute of Bombay sought to remedy the problem by supporting more advanced education for priests. But the effort backfired. The students who went on to university from priestly studies merely chose other vocations to which their higher education attracted them.

Qualifying for Ordination

The candidate must undergo twice in a row for *Naver*, and once more for *Maratab*, the *Bareshnum* rite of purification. A fit priest must be clean or pure in body, mind and spirit; a person careless of his body is likely to harbour cheap and disreputable thoughts and to be of mean and unambitious spiritual temper. But, the need to avoid mistakes that would vitiate the rite and require starting all over again, makes one wonder if there is really place for reflection upon ideal states of character and mind.

The Nature of the Vocation

A priest's work consists, in quantitative terms, of being a member of a fire-temple staff and performing his share of rites.

The symbolism of the rituals belonged originally to a culture that was rural, agrarian, pre-scientific and provincial. Though the culture changed for most Zoroastrians, the symbols remained the same — except for one thing: people no longer knew their meaning. Even the priests were slipping into ignorance of the meaning of what they were doing; all they knew was that the rituals were supposed to possess great power. Thus, the character-building worship of authentic religion gradually reverted to what it had been before Zoroaster's great revolution — a set of magic formulas for calling the deities' power down to earth to satisfy human wants.

The Modern age

As the laity in ever greater numbers abandoned the simple, rural life and outlook, they aspired to higher education which demanded, and at the same time stimulated, intelligence and imagination, creativity and disciplined thinking. The priests, however, continued to be trained almost exactly as before and to do what they had always done. Understandably, priesthood lost its meaning, its respectability and the appeal necessary to attract new recruits. The situation is a prime example of the proverbial vicious circle. If *behdins* (the laity) do not respect the priests and their role enough to pay them well, the profession cannot attract the ablest candidates. The greater the proportion of the least able practitioners in the ranks, the more the vocation will be a refuge for sons who cannot succeed in anything else. And, the greater the mediocrity, the less the *behdins* are interested in rewarding it by paying well for what is of little value to them.

The Future

The future for the priesthood, therefore, looks bleak unless changes are made.

First: the priestly vocation should be redefined. The priest should teach the history, theology and ethics of the religion by public lecture and in group classes. He should be a counselor who, at least, explains the meaning and responsibilities associated with the *navjote*, marriage and death ceremonies; and, at best, inspires the confidence of the *behdins* as a wise and judicious listener and adviser when they need to discuss personal matters.

Second: the training should be restructured.

Most of it should be given after a choice has been made to enter the profession. For, it is by choosing a vocation that is challenging, that strong motivation is generated and the study for it made fascinating. As in law or medicine, study for the priesthood should come after general studies in arts and sciences.

This suggestion runs counter to the new *mobadi*-oriented plan, introduced this year at the M. F. Cama Athornan Institute, Bombay, which expects the student to have already made priesthood his choice of vocation when he is, probably, under ten. It then provides for his complete education in seven years, after which he is expected to commit himself full-time to the vocation for a minimum of 15 years.

Third: an organization should be formed, consisting of priests and laity, to develop a curriculum for re-

Though the culture changed for most Zoroastrians, the symbols remained the same—except for one thing: people no longer knew their meaning.

ligious education and a programme for publication of material for all age groups. This organization could be used as a model for organizing, in every Zoroastrian community, a local ecclesiastical-policy commission which could study, discuss and recommend religious and social policies to the already existing agencies (such as the *panchayat*, *anjuman* and fire-temple trustees) for implementation.

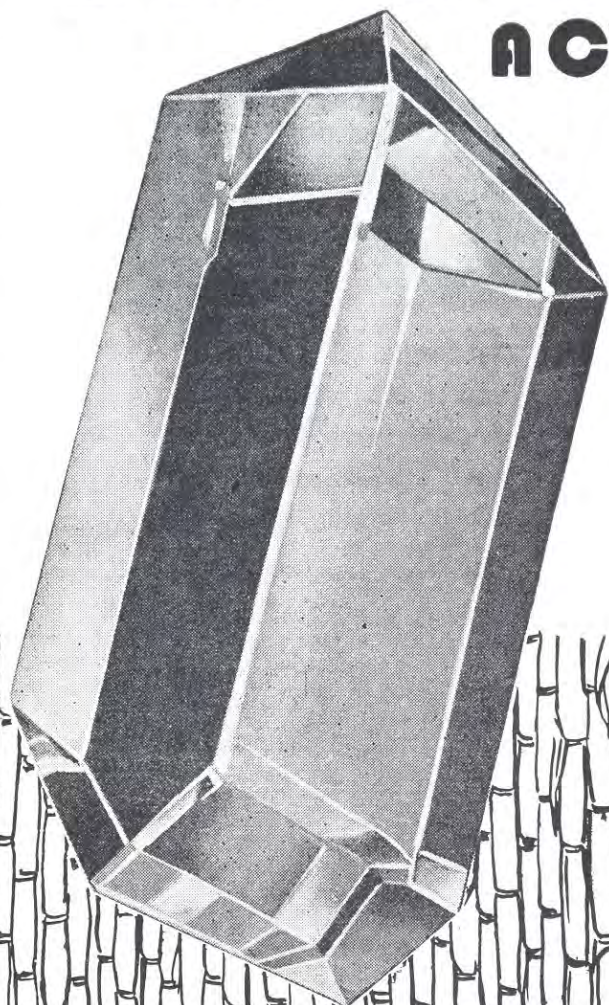
Fourth: a new system of compensation for priests that would make their income commensurate with the income derived from engaging in other professions, should be formulated.

The system should involve regular, modest and voluntary contributions from all 'confessing' Zoroastrians and rely, in part, on the present custom of paying for specific ceremonies, and the monies thus collected should be distributed to the community's fire-temples. If more full-time, well qualified priests can be brought into the profession, the part-time ones should gradually be discouraged. It would be unethical for them to profit from fees that should be part of the full-time priest's up-graded income.

None of these proposals can be implemented easily; but the community is not without the leaders or the vision so urgently required. When Zoroastrians have faced actual life-or-death situations before, they have chosen life. I believe that the available resources of courage and ability are adequate for helping the community to choose life again.

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Procreate or Perish

by Katayun Gould

Surat Shehrni Parsi Vasti Vignatvar Ankda, ane Samagra Parsi Samajni Vasti, Udtu Avlokan, 1975 (A Survey of the Parsi Community of the City of Surat and an Overview of the Parsi Community in India), by Ratan R. Marshall. Surat Parsi Panchayat, 1976. 90pp (Gujerati).

Publications on the fertility of the Parsis in India can be divided into two types: the articles and books which have been written by scholars, whose interest in the Parsis is more academic than personal; and the works of Parsi authors intending to arouse the consciousness of the community regarding its dwindling numbers.

These two categories are not mutually exclusive, but the scholars are more intrigued by the fact that the Parsis present such a remarkable exception to the galloping population of India, while the Parsi authors, on the other hand, do not view this phenomenon as an accomplishment. They are, understandably, concerned about the survival of the community if this trend of declining numbers, which started two decades ago, is to continue unchecked.

Marshall's book is a good example of the kind written by Parsi authors to stimulate discussion and action by the community regarding its declining numbers. This is the third survey of a Parsi community in Gujarat to be published in the last three years, the others being the surveys of Navsari and Valsad, whose original intent was to gather basic census data, so that authoritative statements could be made about the composition and

characteristics of these communities. Along with the figures on the total population of the city, the Surat survey also groups the findings according to the major areas where Parsis are concentrated. This could help the different *anjumans* in the city, by providing them with specific data on their own members to use in any plans involving their jurisdiction.

The study reveals, that the Surat Parsis are so heavily weighted in favour of the 51-and-over age group, with proportionately fewer dependants under age 15, that the community is bound to lose population in the next few decades. Unfortunately, more precise data on age-sex composition is not available in order to make any authoritative statements, while even the population percentage in these broad age groups is not calculated. Any judgement about the number of single people—a serious problem among the Parsis—is difficult to make, since only raw data is presented rather than the percentage of this group in the total population. Also, no data on the number of single females over age 45, a more reliable figure in terms of fertility rather than the number of single women over age 25, the age chosen in the report, is available. This is the wrong age, even from the point of view of choosing a single cut-off point, to report the never-married woman, since the mean age of marriage for Parsi females in 1971 was 26.6 years, as Marshall himself quotes. These technical details might not seem important, as the report was written for general circulation, but since the author wants to use the data to make as strong a case, as pos-

sible, for immediate consideration and action, the proper use of statistics would have helped him to show the actual dimensions of the problem more clearly.

One of the social problems, to which the author rightly draws attention, is the disproportionate number of males receiving education as compared to females. Again, a detailed analysis of the level of education of each sex would have provided the answers, rather than speculation on why wastage of females is more prominent than of males. Other problems discussed are the disproportionate numbers concentrated in service occupations rather than the professions, the decline in socio-economic conditions, and the dependance of the community on Parsi charities.

Marshall also summarizes studies on the community in other parts of India, which help to see how the Surat Parsis compare. Historical data is also used to examine the changes which have adversely affected the community. Two chapters, a summary of studies of the influence of westernization on Parsi fertility behavior, and the incidence of marriages with close collaterals and non-Parsis, are interesting. As these studies have been published only in English, Marshall's considerable work in compiling and summarizing them will now make them available to the Parsi community.

In the final chapter on recommendations for action, some important ideas are haphazardly distributed amongst trivial points; for example, the ill-effects of consanguineous marriages is followed by the possible relationship between

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the need to keep 'paying guests' and the desire to limit the family. Although his data on education shows that the wastage of females is greater than males (p. 23), he impressionistically makes the statement that women have made good progress in education, and males should determine not to fall behind in this regard (p. 84). In fact, the statement should have been reversed, with the admonition to the community to examine the differential treatment, educational tracking and provision of opportunity for higher education for females.

This chapter illustrates the need for Parsi leaders to seek the help of specialists in demography in order to arrive at some workable solutions. If the two groups (of scholars and/or of community leaders) exchanged ideas or worked collaboratively on this topic, it would be evident that the trend in Parsi population needs to be understood, not in terms of the last two decades, but as the working out of a cycle which started in the last century. The Parsi experience needs to be put into perspective by

comparing it to similar demographic patterns which have emerged in all developed societies, but not enough attention is paid by the 'Parsis' to the difficulties involved in reversing a demographic trend once it has gone full cycle. Once these diminishing trends are set, they usually appear to have become irreversible, except for a short period after World War II. This does not imply that the community should accept the reduction in its present size as inevitable. The Parsis must realize the enormity of the task which confronts them, and seek the help of demographers to survey the community systematically and find appropriate measures to deal with the problem.

First, systematic data on the community in India must be gathered, as in the survey of Greater Bombay which was undertaken by the census of India at the behest of Sapur Desai. It is doubtful that the Government of India would want to undertake such a major project, since Parsis outside Bombay constitute such a miniscule proportion of the entire

Indian population. The Parsi *panchayats* might have to get together and spend the necessary resources to hire consultants to design and carry out the study. Isolated surveys like the ones of Surat and other cities are useful and important in the context of their own communities, but these studies are not designed to gather the detailed information necessary to arrive at some systematic conclusions. If the Parsis continue to be apathetic in this area, as they have been till now, then, as Leela Visaria has so well documented, their 'eventual extinction ... appears a distant although a distinct possibility.' If the population continues to decline at the annual rate of one per cent observed during 1951-71, it would reach one-half its present size around the year 2040, and one-fourth of its present size in the year 2110. A reversal of this trend is a long-range project with dubious results, but the Parsis have no choice.

Ms Gould is associate professor, School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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The Three Facets of Ruby

by Geeta Doctor

'Lagankhel' produced by Indian National Theatre and directed by Adi Marzban.

The billing for *Lagankhel* could well have read, 'Starring: Ruby Patel, Ruby Patel and Ruby Patel', since this triple set of playlets is obviously meant as a showcase for her talents. One has to admire the stamina of the actress. During the first part of the evening, she was on the stage continuously for almost an hour; and though the other two skits were shorter with a break between them, the entire burden of keeping the pace going was, again, largely on her. When one realizes that most of the action in Adi Marzban's plays depends largely on what the actors are saying, this is no small feat. If Ruby Patel's jaws were wired to a measuring device, they might have established an interesting record for perpetual motion.

All three playlets are set in a room of a five-star hotel — one of Mr Marzban's pet scenarios which reflect everything that is tawdry, artificial and commercialized about a hotel.

In the first play, Ruby Patel, a doting, middle-aged wife, is bent on celebrating her wedding anniver-

sary in the same hotel room she spent her honeymoon in. Burjor Patel is the jaded husband who is less than enthusiastic about his wife's anniversary ardour. After several attempts at seducing her none too receptive husband, the situation falls apart when he admits to what she has always playfully accused him of: being in love with his secretary. At this point, this supposedly hilariously funny comedy slams to a stop with the husband walking out, leaving the wife by herself in the hotel, on their anniversary.

In the second skit, Tarak Mehta is a successful film director with an over developed libido. Considering the types of *cliche* these plays deal in, it is like saying that he is a leopard with spots. Since he is a film director, he is also a suave sex-maniac, dressed, therefore, in scarlet printed shirt and even gaudier tie, while his hotel bedroom is strewn with girlie magazines and lewd posters, which the hotel boys, always ready to fill in the weak spots in the action, gawk at. Enter Ruby Patel, a sexy housewife who has come to renew her acquaintance with the director whom she knew in her college days. The director immediately, and as it happens,

rightly, interprets this friendly impulse on her part, as an invitation to the seduction which, predictably ensues. Both, however, act with sufficient poise and sophistication to give the plot some credibility, and, fortunately, the lights are turned off just at the right (pant, pant,) moment.

The third is the funniest sequence, since it has Dinyar Contractor opposite Ruby — now, the distraught mother of a bride who has locked herself in the hotel bathroom. Most of the dialogue is aimed at the keyhole of the bathroom door, as the parents beg and cajole and finally threaten the daughter with the consequences of her behaviour, while all the time there are reminders from father-in-law that the guests are waiting. Dinyar portrays superbly an irate father getting more and more agitated and, in the process, becoming totally ineffectual in dealing with his daughter's silent tantrums until the bridegroom saves the day by walking in and asking his wife-to-be to 'cool it!'

That, perhaps, is the advice all who go to Marzban's plays, expecting more than mindless entertainment, should take to heart.



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