

Parsiānā

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BPP ELECTORAL REFORM

Slow and Unsteady

The mills of reform in the Bombay Parsi Panchayet grind slowly. In March the Panchayet trustees took a decision to form a committee "to amend the Scheme for Election of the Trustees of the Parsi Panchayet." A report was to be presented by July 31. On July 5 a press notice was issued that some new members had been added to the committee and on July 21 the first meeting of the committee was held. After some discussion, the committee members were requested to submit their suggestions "in writing with regard to the present scheme" by August 31. The next meeting of the committee has been scheduled for October 13. And the committee's report is to be ready by December 31.

As the public and the Press are not invited to the committee meetings, we publish the minutes of the meeting as the matter is of importance to the community.

"The Chairman Mr (Jal R.) Vimadlal welcomed all the members and stated that there was a feeling in the community that the present Scheme for the Election of the Trustees of the Parsi Panchayet should be reconsidered. The Trustees had therefore appointed this Committee to see whether the Scheme already in existence needed any change or amendment. The first thing according to him to consider was whether there should be direct election, or indirect election as at present. He stated that personally, he was very much against direct election. He pointed out some of the evils of direct election and

stated that looking to our experience in the political elections held in the country there was a chance of votes being purchased and sold. A direct election, he thought, would open the door to a lot of mischief. In spite of different opinions with regard to the election of the Trustees, amongst all the Trustees that had been elected till now, it could not be said that there was a single undesirable Trustee elected under the present system. He, therefore, stated that he would like to have the views of the members on

If we find the system to be workable then it may not be found necessary for the Committee to suggest any changes at all.

this basic question, namely, direct election or indirect election.

"Mr (J. G.) Kanga expressed the opinion that the Committee should first examine the existing system and the question of direct voting or indirect voting should be considered last. He also wanted to know whether it was open to the Committee to recommend an entirely new Scheme.

"Mr (S.P.) Dadachanji wanted to know what would be the plus and what would be the minus points, if the Committee were to recommend direct election. He wanted to know whether there were statistics as to the Parsi population and how many

eligible or effective voters were there among them. To this, Mr Vimadlal replied that there were about 95,000 Parsis in the whole of India of which about 65,000 were in Bombay, but he was not in a position to give any split-up of adults over 18 or 21 who would be eligible to vote. Mr Vimadlal stated that there was no register of births maintained by the Panchayet.

"Mr (J.H.A.) Vakil wanted to know whether the Committee was to work on the system which was in existence or on any other Scheme.

"Mr Eruch Desai drew the attention of the members that the resolution of the Trustees was for the amendment to the present Scheme of the Election of the Trustees and consideration by us of whether to scrap this indirect system of election would be an exercise in futility.

"To a question put to Mr G. P. Antia as to the number of Parsi adults who were educated and those who are not educated, that is, who had studied up to S.S.C. Standard and/or beyond, Mr Antia stated that at least 50 per cent of the adults would come under this category of educated Parsis.

"Mr Kanga suggested that in order to find out how many persons were poor and were taking doles, information could be gathered from various sources, if we say that poverty is one of the main dangers to direct election.

"Mr (Nadir) Modi stated that we were starting with a Scheme which had worked well for the last over 60

years in the sense that there has been not a single dishonest Trustee. He thought that the right approach to this problem would be to start from the existing Scheme and to see what are the faults, if any, of this system and find a solution to the same. If we find the system to be workable then it may not be found necessary for the Committee to suggest any changes at all. He did not think that the Committee was formed to suggest changes only for the sake of changes. If it is not necessary to change it, then we leave the Scheme as it is.

"There was some discussion amongst the members with regard to taking a census of the Parsis as to how many were literate and how many were illiterate, how many on dolo, how many were above the age of 21 and so on, when Prof. Khurshed C. Sheriar mentioned about his personal experience and difficulties in trying to obtain such statistics only from a restricted area like Bandra.

"Mr (Jamshed N.) Guzder stated that it would be a difficult affair to maintain a register of adults, for every year there would be people coming up to the age of 21. Secondly, it would cost a lot of time and money

to prepare and maintain such registers. To hold election on adult franchise basis would also cost a lot of money. This aspect of the cost had also to be considered.

The scope of the Committee is limited and the question is how to improve the present system.

"On inquiry, the Honorary Secretary stated that the corpus of the Registration Fund from which the expenses of the Elections were met was very small. It was about Rupees ten thousand and the income was about Rs 1100/- per annum.

"Mr Kanga suggested that we start with certain colonies to collect the information needed as enumerated above.

"Mr Vimadlal stated that such a survey would take more than a year or two.

"Mr Eruch Desai again reiterated that the scope of the Committee was limited and that the question was how to improve the present system. He,

therefore, thought that it was not necessary to go into details of the statistics regarding the economic condition of the community.

"Mr Kobad Noble stated that it was futile to talk of statistics of the Parsi community and it would be a sheer waste of time. We should consider first what are the difficulties and defects that we find in the present Scheme of Election. If we find this Scheme to be not workable, then only we can think of other alternative schemes.

"Mr Vimadlal thought that, according to his opinion, there were two points to be considered. One was that the present system of the indirect election should have a broader base and secondly what weightage should be given to the donors of Rs 5,000/- and above.

"Mr Vakil stated that the Scheme was working since the last 70 years and there had been amendments from time to time as and when they were found necessary. The members should therefore only consider what further amendments, if any, are necessary to this Scheme.

Continued on page 8, col. 3

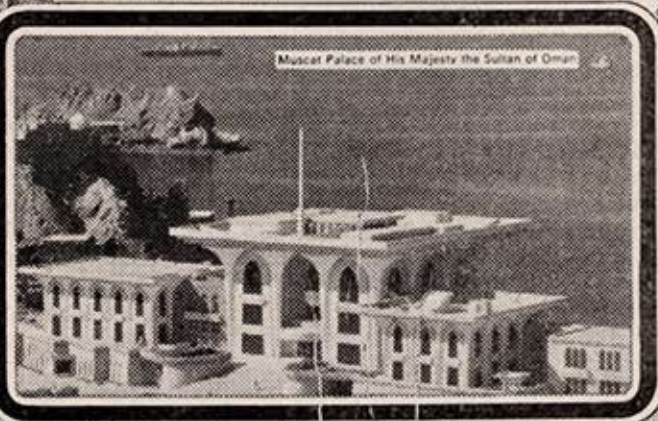
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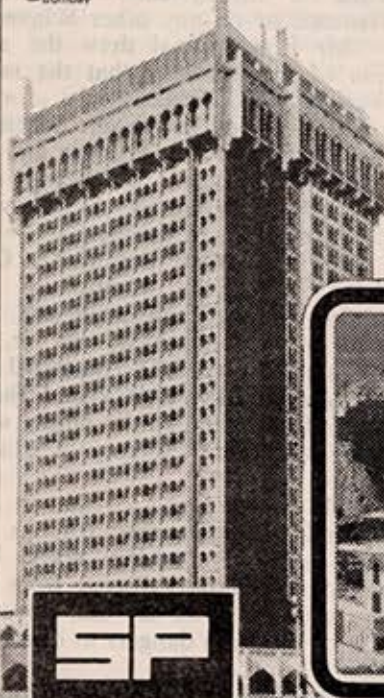
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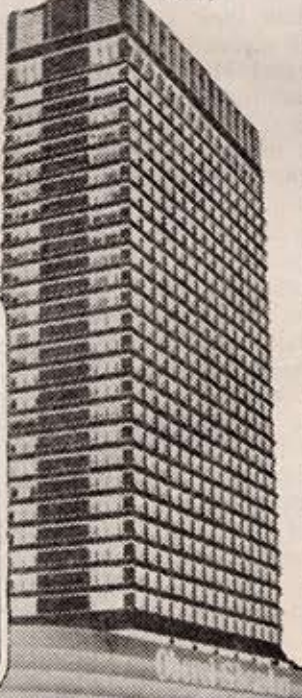


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LEARN and EARN

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 November. Answers will be published in the next issue.



1 Can a Parsi couple adopt a child under Parsi law?

2 What is the Geh Sarna a recital of?

3 When is a Parsi male referred to as a var-raja?

4 What is the name for the central well in the towers of silence?

5 Why is the kumkum (red pigment) on the forehead long and vertical for a man and round for a woman?

6 In which towns or cities in India are non-Parsis permitted to pay their last respect to the dead after the Geh Sarna ceremony?

7 Aside from India, which other countries have agiaries or atash behrams?

8 What is the difference between a Khandhia and a Nassasalar?

9 Which city of the world has the second largest Zoroastrian population?

10 Which Panchayat or anjuman has the second largest assets in India?

There are three first prize winners for Z Quiz 5 (*Parsiana*, March '78): K. D. Chagema, B. S. Surti and Ms K. F. Servai. Below are the answers to Z Quiz 5.

1. Which Parsi rose to eminence in the court of the Peshwas?

Khursetji Jamsetji Mody of Pune (1755-1815) worked for Peshwa Bajirao II as Sur-Suba or Revenue Commissioner of the Carnatic.

2. What are the main themes of the Bundahishn?

The Bundahishn or "Creation", is a Zoroastrian compilation with three main themes: creation, the nature of earthly creatures and the history of the Kayanians. Also called the *Zand Agahih* (Knowledge from the Zand), it probably grew through different editions after the Arab conquest to the 12th century A.D. It survives in two

versions, the Great (or Iranian) and the Indian.

3. Which orchestra in the U. S. does Zubin Mehta conduct?

Till his appointment to the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, Mehta conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

4. How many initiatory ceremonies are there for the Zoroastrian priesthood?

Two, the *navar* and the *martab*.

5. What is the sagdid ceremony?

Sagdid, means "sight of the dog" and the ceremony is the bringing of the dog to a corpse during funeral ceremonies.

6. Which town in India is named for a great Parsi industrialist?

The industrial town of Jamshedpur in Bihar, named for Jamsetji Tata.

7. What is the literal meaning of navjote?

Nav means new and *jote*, someone who offers prayers.

8. What is the Yasna?

Yasna (to invoke, to praise) is a prayer which praises God and his Intelligences and invokes their aid. It is accompanied by ritual and symbolic offerings. The prayer, which consists of 72 chapters, is recited by two priests; the 72 strands of the *kusti* are said to represent these chapters.

9. Who was the first qualified woman architect in India?

Perin (Jamsetjee Mistri) A. Bhiwandiwala who received the diploma in 1936 from the J. J. School of Art in Bombay.

10. Who built the famous palace complexes at Persepolis in Iran?

Darius I and Xerxes I.

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BOOK REVIEW

Political Memoirs

Manohar Malgonkar

Bliss was it in that Dawn by Minoo Masani, Arnold Heinemann, Rs 30.

My initial reaction to Minoo Masani's *Bliss was it in that Dawn* was one of disappointment and annoyance that it should tell its readers so little about the author's life. The pronouncement of the subtitle that it is a 'Political Memoir,' may be the answer to this criticism, but hardly satisfying to someone like me who has known Masani not as a political sacred cow but as a warm and many-sided human being.

Masani, the most devastating debunker of Communism, Indian or of any other variety, is a familiar enough figure to most of us, but how many of us know that he was also the author of a book that sold over a million copies? As it happens, and perhaps only because that book had the proper political overtones, *Bliss* does mention Masani's best seller (*Our India*). But the fact that Masani was a powerful swimmer is brought out almost apologetically, as a prop to underline his lifelong propensity for swimming against the tide. As a writer and a poor swimmer, I feel that Masani has done a disservice to himself as well as to his readers. Surely there was some interesting experience connected with this prowess as a swimmer that was worth telling? If not a beautiful maiden saved from drowning, at least a dessicated politician?

Perhaps I can demonstrate my vexation better by revealing something that the book does not even mention, that Masani was, at one time, a competent boxer. I believe that pugilistic skill is sufficiently unusual in a politician to find a line in the account of his life, even if he had no occasion to use it on the floor of the Parliament.

Having begun this review with criticism, let me cite a further disappointment. I found that the whole book is largely a stringing together of letters sent by Minoo Masani to other politicians, or by them to him. But then I realize that no other device would have served equally well in bringing out what I have always considered Masani's special place in Indian political life, that he has so



Foes of the Emergency: (left to right) C. R. Irani, A. D. Gorwala, Soli Sorabji, Ramnath Goenka and Masani.

often proved to be right when most of the other leaders of our country have been wrong. By quoting from his own and other people's letters, he leaves absolutely no room for those who differed from him to accuse him of hindsight. The image that takes shape is of a headmaster shaking a finger and saying, with a well-bred chuckle more than in anger, "I told you so," to a host of India's leaders including... dare one say it... Jayaprakash Narayan himself.

Masani's understated reporting of his lifelong friendship with JP is one of the best things in *Bliss*. No matter how much both men differed on fundamental issues or clashed at open meetings, it does not seem to have made the slightest difference to their regard and affection for each other. That such a friendship should survive the rough and tumble of political life is equally a tribute to both men, to their tolerance, their readiness to admit mistakes, to their respect for each other's integrity.

There is an amusing letter from JP in the book alluding to "the happiest days I have spent in prison," when Masani was his fellow prisoner. Not to be outdone, Masani too has some startling offbeat observation on prison life. "There is no place like prison to size up one's friends," he comments. "A sense of humour is what one needs most." He scoffs at those who make a fuss about solitary confinement. "My preference, without

any hesitation, was for a single cell... the free hours of solitude was something I always enjoyed." And again, "One of the finest things about prison life is the amount of reading one can do." Once, in his search for a quiet place away from "the dormitory atmosphere," he landed himself in a punishment cell set aside for hard-case criminals, and woke up the next morning "literally a fleabite... (with) a score or more of bugs still on me."

Inevitably, as it must in every book about the politics of the period, Gandhi figures prominently, not as the Mahatma, the colossus, nor a saint in sanctified garments, unapproachable, but as Gandhiji, the politically astute and civilized guide, philosopher and friend of the author. Masani describes him as a total revolutionary and a pathfinder, and dedicates his book to him.

Knowing that *Bliss was it in that Dawn* is the first half of Masani's political memoir, I finished reading it with a sense of anticipation as well as foreboding, for what follows the bliss of dawn is the disillusionment brought about by the harsh light of the day. In the second volume, much of what Masani will have to say, must, of necessity, deal with "the petty politicking" which Gandhiji despised and to which the Indian leaders "reverted with his passing."

I can hardly wait.

Courtesy: The Aryan Path

Point of no return?

Homi B. Minocher Homji

Extracts from the preface of the book *O Whither Parsis?* by Homi B. Minocher Homji

Today, if a community leader was asked to describe the Parsis he would perhaps have to say: we the Parsis are such individualists that where three of us meet, there are four irreconcilable views, none of which are based on logic, learning or rationality. We follow three calendars, and five New Year days annually; that we have so blinded ourselves with our self-woven cocoon of past glory, that we are unable to make a rational judgement on our own degeneration. We get more emotional on the ways of the disposal of our dead, than concerned about the welfare of the living; that because we had survived Alexander and the Arabs, we shall survive into the distant future by the Grace of Ahura Mazda, even if we sit with folded arms, and do nothing about our dwindling numbers or about our outdated concepts and policies. Time moves on but Parsis do not; we do not realize when it is time for change and when we do, it is usually too late!

Author Alvin Toffler in "Future Shock" says that changes are now taking place in our world at such an accelerating rate, that the changes that have taken place within the last five decades, exceed all the earlier changes that have taken place cumulatively in the entire history of mankind. The capacity of the human biology to continually accommodate itself to absorbing such rapid changes is greatly strained. He therefore wonders whether mankind may not soon come to a breaking point and whether it will ever have the good sense to institute drastic changes and reforms in its own life-style, aimed at living in harmony with such endless change.

During the life-time of an adult, over sixty years old today, several cataclysmic changes have taken place, even in such comparatively underdeveloped and non-technological societies as ours. Multinational and binational destructive warfares, racial and internecine massacres, revolutions, jettisoning of colonial regimes

and the birth of new countries, ideological conflicts between the haves and the have nots, capitalist systems yielding to socialism or to communism, highly organised mass crimes, powerful weapons of total destruction, unbelievable technological advancement, breakup of the village society and of the joint family, intensive urbanization etc.; all these have affected us variously in this sub-continent, forcing on us changes in our individual life-styles. But as a community, the Parsis see no need for any reform or change. Haven't we lasted 12 centuries and more?

Our anomaly is that economically we are a free enterprise, capitalistic, liberal society but socially we are a rigid, conservative, non-changing religious group. This, despite the fact that throughout its historical vicissitudes, its emigration and the adoption of new customs, practices and languages, and its instinctive courage for new experiments and enterprises, the community had already been endowed with a high degree of elasticity, social mobility and adaptability. On the one hand, this had helped to make the community, wealthy and powerful, whereas on the other hand its social rigidity had helped to retain the essence of our religious beliefs, customs and practices, despite the surrounding oceans of humanity of different castes, creeds and customs. But we did not know when to call a halt, before these characteristics became counterproductive. In other words we do not have the feel of time and neither do we change with the times.

With the disappearance of the god-fathering British and the proportionately accelerating advances in education and enterprise by sister communities, the comparative edge held by the Parsis, started to diminish around the time of the second world war. With the achievement of Independence and the Partition based primarily on a two-nation perspective, the Parsis suddenly found themselves divided, without patronage and jolted out of their placidity. Having to some extent already degenerated through narrow parochial attitudes, prolonged

genetic inbreeding, isolation from indigenous sister communities, and a weakening community structure resulting from internecine disputes, the community failed to measure up to the requisites of the changed situation. Moreover, under the British free-enterprise system, the Parsis stood on a common, if not a favoured platform with all other sister communities. Religion was not a criterion for the British in distributing their patronage, nor was it any handicap. But consequent upon Partition, the dominant majority communities on either side of the border became a very strong factor to reckon with. Not to belong to the majority community, placed a minority group at a very considerable social, economic and cultural handicap and tended to edge it away from the focus of power. The weakened community structure was incapable of providing any coherent or dynamic leadership or any corrective and compensatory programme of action. As a community therefore, it started moving down the socio-economic grading without even realising the serious nature or dimensions of this deterioration.

The rich of yester years, became the upper-middle class traders of today; the upper-middle class, became the middle-class fixed income earners; and the lower-middle class became the new poor of the community. The urban landed gentry and the hereditary fixed-income earning classes, through their own inaction or incapacity to move with the times, or through a lack of collective community guidance or the inflexibility of family trusts, whittled away their precious inheritance.

Whereas the majority, particularly in larger urban centres, gives distinct visual evidence of an impoverished and unhealthy community, frustrated, leaderless and unable to adjust to the disappearance of the British Raj, it tries to seek refuge by invoking a community and racial superiority which in fact, no longer exists. Nevertheless there have been two notable exceptions. One, is the young and middle-aged group which has thrown up a small number of more dynamic

adventurous entrepreneurs and public sector leaders, who could move with the times and some even became the *nouveau riche* or practising top-level professionals and executives. These soon learnt how to rough it out with professional competitors, through sheer dint of hard work and they made good. The other, the still younger lot, sick and tired of the immobility, double standards and lack of genuine, honest and modernised community leadership, but fortunately still possessing a strain of the traditional pioneering spirit, moved away to distant lands. They sought a new life, a freedom of expression from both the narrowing polity and the outmoded ritualistic religious conventions and constraints, so as to establish themselves afresh by their own grit, in new continents. This exodus still continues. These are our Pilgrim Fathers of tomorrow.

What is left behind, is the *status quo* element of the old and the ageing, the rabid traditionalists, the meek reformists and a community that is numerically dwindling into extinction, in an attempt to maintain a mythical purism.

That's mythical purism, and we shall see later why we call it mythical, has

led to the hardening of our religious attitude and to its consequent failure to incorporate the necessary modernization. Ironically, this myth we are trying to uphold is mainly responsible for decimating the very community it hopes to preserve. Though continuing to wear the Sadreh and Kusti, as a token formality, we are rapidly losing to the Faith a large number of adult people and their children who find no emotional satisfaction nor relevance or meaning in a religion riddled by ritual, as applying to their day to day demands and life-styles. Such frustration attracts them to alternative faiths, beliefs and even spiritual exercise which they can follow more readily and with greater satisfaction. We are so cluttered up with our rituals and priest-craft and our borrowed beliefs and social customs, that we have forgotten the pristine purity of Zarathushtra's proclaimed religion. We have to now look for it in scholarly works. Few have that time. And do the parents themselves know enough of the religion and have the time and aptitude to pass it on to their children? ... or do they leave it hopefully to the teacher or to the Mobed who is invited—once in a lifetime for a couple of months, to teach

the Navjote prayers. Can we then blame the young generation for evincing no interest in religion. How much worse will it be for parents abroad, whose children are exposed to a constant Christian ethos or a Godless mass media?

If no positive intervention takes place, what will be the shape of things to come, and what will be its effect on the continuation or otherwise of the Parsi community as we know it today? Are we degenerating, disintegrating, bifurcating and disappearing? Have we investigated, reasoned and understood this process? Are we, as a community group, going to sufficiently reorient and modernise ourselves to meet the demands of the time? Or shall we stick to our platitudes and self-imposed puritanism, unto death—a vanished race!

The question then to be answered is whether we, this handful of remnants of a glorious religion and of a super-culture, could continue to be, the proper custodians and propagators of this invaluable inheritance? Or, whether our present methods, concepts, orthodoxy, rituals and introvert attitudes are not precipitating in fact the liquidation of this shrinking community. If our religion enjoins ACTIVE

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propagation of all that is good and beneficial to the Kingdom of Ahura Mazda and equally active disassociation from all that is representative of Ahriman, then whose purpose are we really serving better by letting sleeping dogs lie and seeing the community decimated?

Is all this change around us just a passing phase and will it eventually revert to 'normalisation' or will it continue to accelerate and intensify. In the latter case, will our present inertia prove so detrimental to us in future, as to inflict upon us irrevocable damage, from which, later on, we will have no capacity to recover. This self-evaluation is not going to be easy, for a traditionally self-virtuous society, with preconceived, though misplaced notions of its own historical grandeur, and social advancement. This is a drill that we have to undertake now, bringing it to bear on the projected longer-term effects, some three or four generations hence. We have no choice. It is a matter between survival or extinction.

In the author's view the current crisis of confidence in the community is not a passing phase. All indicators are massed against us and the seriousness of the situation facing the community is comparable only to that which our ancestors faced in Kohistan thirteen centuries ago, though rather different in nature.

We have already dragged our feet too long and become immobile and inelastic—we have now almost reached the point of no return. Significant and unprecedented changes and reforms are required to be undertaken within the structure of our society with a bold heart and a clear mind. New institutions, new structures, new laws, new leadership, new norms and above all, a very liberal outlook is vital. Thus without destroying what is proven and useful in our religion and tenable in the community, we might yet with a scientific approach build thereon, discarding what is obsolete, harmful and retarding to our survival and progress.

About the Author: A former United Nations official who served in the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific as Chief of the Social Development Division, prior to his retirement in 1975, the 65-year old, Karachi born author published his book in March this year. An ordained navar, he has served in the India/Pakistan Army Ordinance Corps and in the Pakistani Government as an undersecretary and deputy secretary.

Elections—Continued from page 2

"Mr Vimadlal agreed with this proposition and stated that the Committee should first find out what the defects in the present system were, and then the question of direct election if it was found necessary to do so.

"After some further discussion, the members agreed to the following proposition:

The sense of the meeting is that the Committee should start with the present Scheme as the basis to find out what are the defects, shortcomings and infirmities in it, if any, and proceed to consider what improvements and amendments should be made in the existing Scheme.

"The sense of the meeting further is that, if necessary, the Committee should also proceed to consider other alternatives to the present Scheme.

"There was further discussion amongst the members, and it was decided that suggestions in writing with regard to the present scheme be submitted by the members to the office of the Parsi Panchayet on or before 31st August 1978, and the office should cyclostyle the suggestions made by each member and circulate the same to each of the other members. The Chairman Mr Vimadlal then gave, in short, the broad outlines of the present Scheme of Election.

"It was further decided to hold the next meeting of the Committee on Friday, 13th October 1978 at 6 PM at the Parsi Panchayet Office.

"The Honorary Secretary Mr Antia was directed to find out, if possible from old records, the details of the order appointing a Commissioner for formulating a Scheme for Election of a Trustee in Suit No. 689 of 1906 (Parsi Panchayet Case) and the report of the Commissioner, if any.

"With a vote of thanks to the Chair the meeting terminated."

Members of the Committee are: Jal R. Vimadlal, Chairman, Neli R. Noble, Jamshed N. Guzder, Eruch B. Desai, Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, Bart., Nadir A. Modi, Khurshed C. Sheriar, Jal H. A. Vakil, Savak P. Dadachanji, Jamshed G. Kanga, Dadi B. Engineer, Fali K. Sidhwa, Kobad R. Noble, Jerroo P. Karai, Savak R. Mistry. Also attending the meeting were R. J. Mehta and G. P. Antia—Hon. Secretary.

In other RPP news, Dr Aspi F. Golwalla, whose ten year term expired in October, won reelection for another ten year term.