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STAR WARS Federation vs. Association 1981

In the courtroom of the community, continues the search for an all-India Zoroastrian body. The Federation of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India under the leadership of Shiavax Nargolwala, the controversial president of the Delhi Parsi Anjuman (DPA), decided at the executive council and general body meeting, held on 20 and 21 December 1980 at the Fariyas Hotel in Bombay, to proceed with the appointment of new members, regardless of the repercussions.

Nargolwala was aware that the greatest threat to the Federation was not from his critics as much as from the inability of the Federation to act decisively over the last three years.

The Bombay Parsi Panchayat (BPP), which in a moment of anger walked out of the Federation and then tried unsuccessfully to oust the DPA, also realized that its image was suffering and so circulated a draft constitution for a new all-India body called The Association of Parsi Zoroastrian Anjumans of India.

Faced with two all-India bodies, both wooing the non-aligned or partially aligned anjumans such as Madras, Secunderabad, Bangalore, and Ahmedabad, the community will have to choose, either, both or neither.

What both bodies represent is quite clear. The Federation, which will consist largely of the anjumans of north and east India, will provide an open forum for its members; the Association, which will consist largely of the anjumans of Gujarat, Maharashtra and the south, will claim to stand for orthodoxy, with the constitution stating very categorically that "if any item on the Agenda of any meeting ... is ... in the opinion of the President of the

Association, prejudicial to the interest of Parsi Zoroastrians, the same shall not be discussed." The draconian veto power over any discussion being delegated to the president of the Association, who is ex-officio the president of the BPP, means that B. K. Boman-Behram, the controversial BPP chairman, would decide what can or cannot be discussed till December 1981 when his term expires, and for another 10 years thereafter, should he seek and win re-election to the Panchayat board.

The constitution of the Federation leaves the censorship power with the executive council, but a subsequent resolution of the council stated no controversial religious subjects could be discussed at the meetings. The resolution was passed to appease the BPP trustees but the clause could now be withdrawn or amended unlike the Association's clause which "shall be unalterable and shall not be amended or deleted," according to the constitution.

World Wars?

The Association also states in a clear reference to the DPA, that no anjuman or panchayat would qualify for membership if it permits "the admission as member, whether honorary or of any other kind or as associate or associate member, of any person who is not a Parsi Zoroastrian". The DPA admits non-Parsi spouses as members with certain limitations, and also confers honorary membership on non-Parsis who have made a substantial contribution to the community. As the Association's memorandum also has a clause pertaining to the formation of a world body, it is to be seen

what position they will adopt to Zoroastrian associations abroad that include non-Parsi spouses and children of Parsi women married to non-Parsis. They may in the world body have to admit such anjumans yet in the all-India body bar them.

Should the Panchayat go ahead with any plan for the formation of another world body it will be duplicating the efforts of the World Zoroastrian Organization formed by the Zoroastrians of England.

In a covering letter, dated 10 November 1980, accompanying the Association's draft constitution, Boman-Behram claimed that the Panchayat withdrew from the Federation after "considerable thought" and that the BPP had "always co-operated very closely with all the members of the Federation." His critics, however, contend the decision to withdraw was taken with more emotion than thought, as the Panchayat left barely 17 days after the successful hosting of the Third World Zoroastrian Congress in Bombay in January 1978. The reason for the hasty departure was Nargolwala's criticism at the Congress of the BPP election system, followed by a clash with BPP Trustee Jal Vimadlal over some legal technicality. As for the claim of close co-operation, nearly all the member anjumans castigated the BPP for withdrawing without consulting any of them.

No Arbitration

The BPP, aware that its decision was unpopular, bargained with the Federation members to arrive at some face-saving formula to return to the fold. But as Boman-Behram states "whilst these efforts were still being made, the

Delhi Parsi (Anjuman) unfortunately amended its constitution, thereby losing its status as a purely Parsi Zoroastrian Anjuman." The DPA, a registered society, had agreed to withdraw from the Federation and place the Delhi Parsi Anjuman Trust in its place, stating that they were two separate bodies. The BPP claimed they were one and the same and reportedly rejected Nargolwala's recommendation that the matter be put to arbitration.

The Federation's executive council meeting of 28 October 1979, asked Delhi to "gracefully withdraw" from the Federation. The DPA at an urgent general meeting held on 3 February 1980, rejected the request.

"We don't mind if another association is to be formed," said Nargolwala at the December council meeting, "If you want to join both, join both." He felt the two bodies should be "judged by their work."

The council meeting had started with its usual tussle over who would preside. Nargolwala being too controversial, the choice was between Jamshed Italia of Secunderabad and Hyderabad and Ardeshir Batliwala of Calcutta, with Nargolwala backing

Batliwala. Italia was particularly peeved with Nargolwala as the Delhi leader had referred to him in a letter as an "old fool." Nargolwala said it was in reply to Italia's allegation in a letter that he was "a dictator." With Italia alienated, Behram Sadhwa of Bangalore pushing for a resolution to expel Delhi from the Federation and Poona's Homai Pudumjee stating the agenda should be once again kept at a standstill since the BPP had not rejoined, Nargolwala's support came from the anjumans in north and east India such as Delhi, Agra, Lucknow, Calcutta and other anjumans such as Rajkot, Jabalpur and the Iranian Zoroastrian Anjuman in Bombay whose relations with the BPP are reported to be strained.

The moment of parting came when the Federation took up the application for membership of the Shree Surat Samast Parsi Anjuman. The Samast group is a rival body to the Surat Parsi Panchayat which was originally in the Federation but withdrew when Bombay left. Eleven delegates voted for admission and nine against, with Dadi Mistry of Delhi abstaining. Shortly after the vote, Pudumjee who

had opposed the admission walked out of the meeting. Italia, who had also voted against admission, left but attended the session the next day. He then informed the council that "Poona does not want to be represented on the council."

The new executive council was appointed with the four new vice-presidents being Nargolwala, north zone, Italia, south zone, Jamshed Aga, Iranian Zoroastrian Anjuman, west zone and Ardeshir Batliwala, east zone.

Nargolwala made it clear in the Saturday afternoon session that the Federation would tackle the important issues facing the community. But how effective the Federation, or any body that does not have the mandate of the entire community, can be is questionable.

The eventual solution may only lie in a truly all-India body. For even though the BPP claims that its new constitution incorporates certain clauses that prevent "a repetition of what happened in the Federation," no constitution can make allowance for one member's taunts and another member's tantrums. That, only tolerance and a commitment to the well-being of the community can accomplish.

LET'S BUILD THEM TOGETHER!

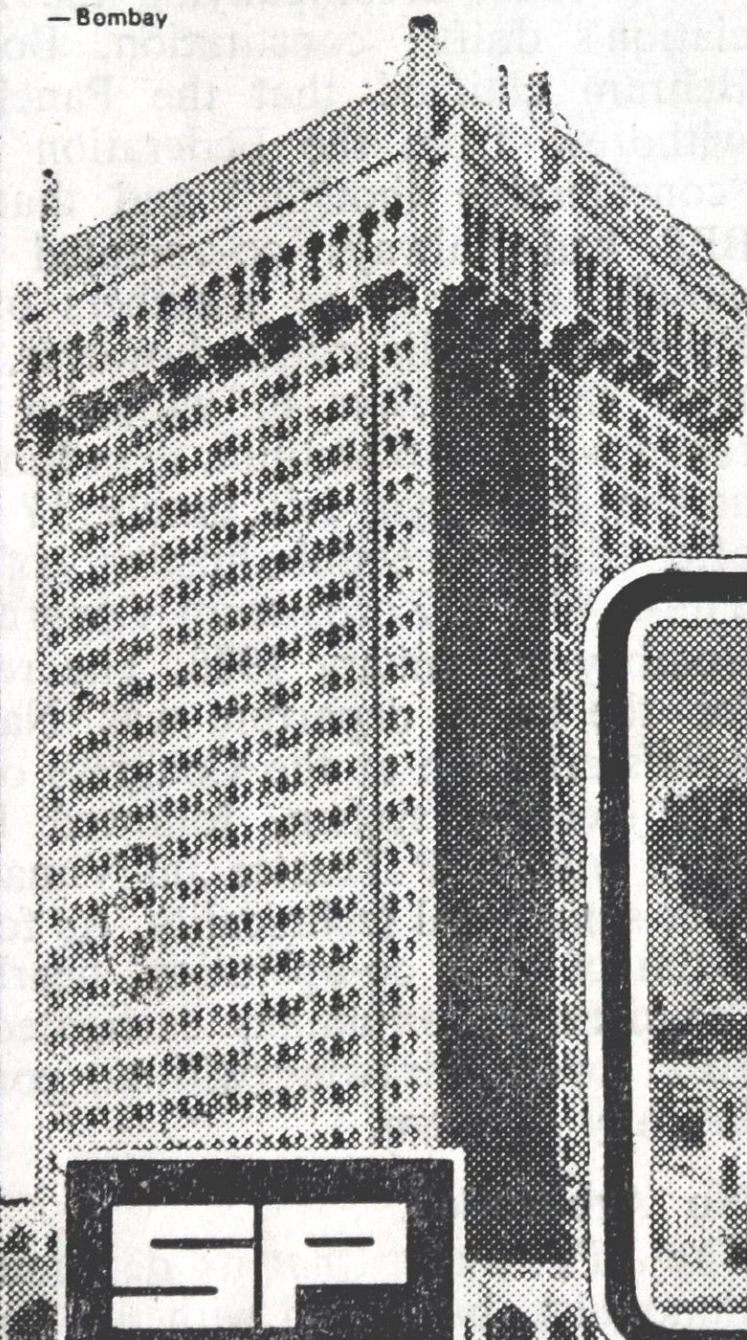
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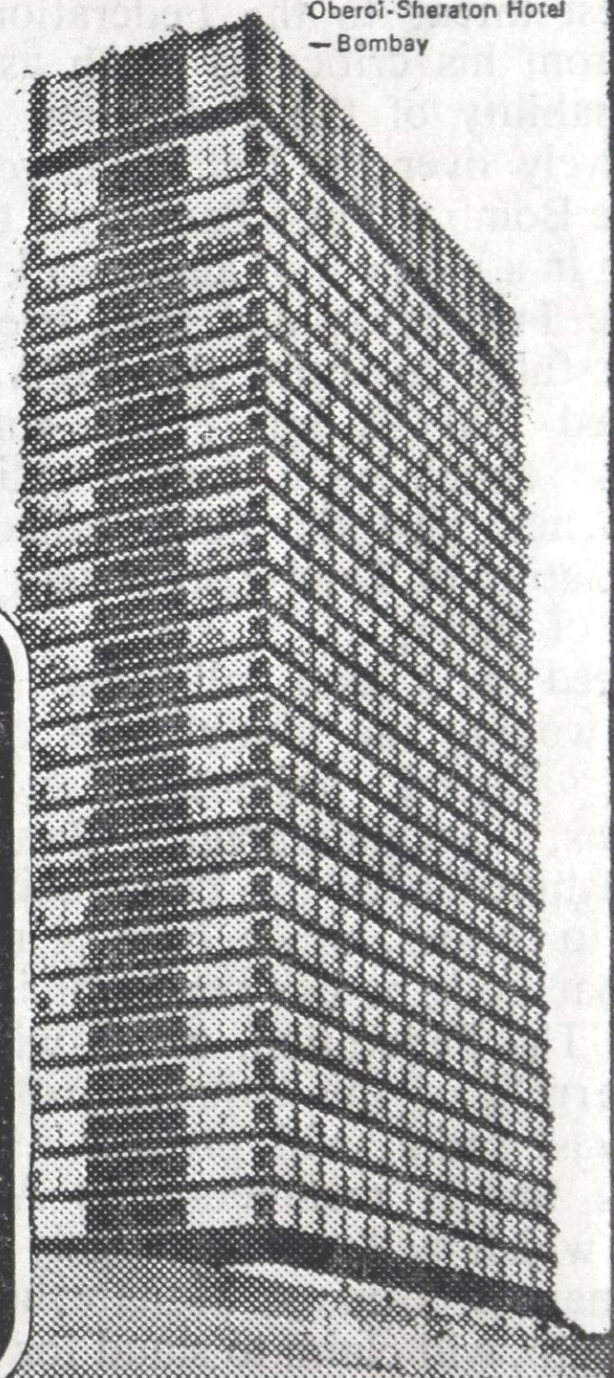
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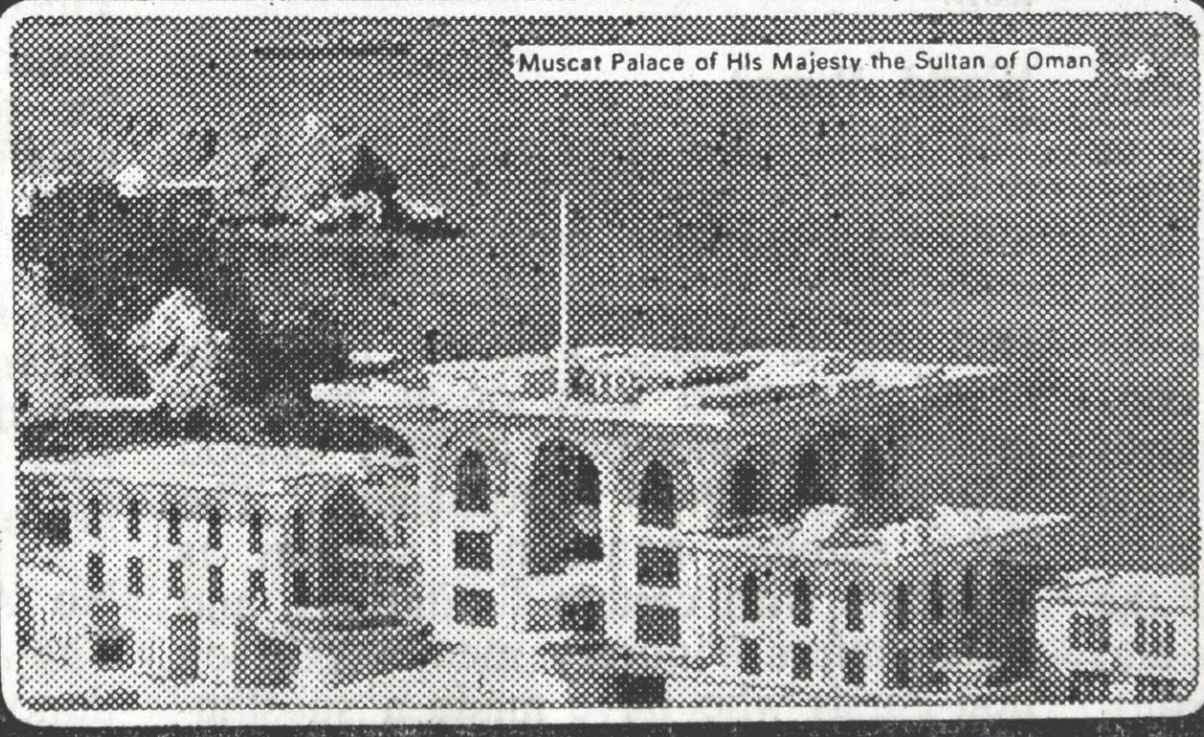
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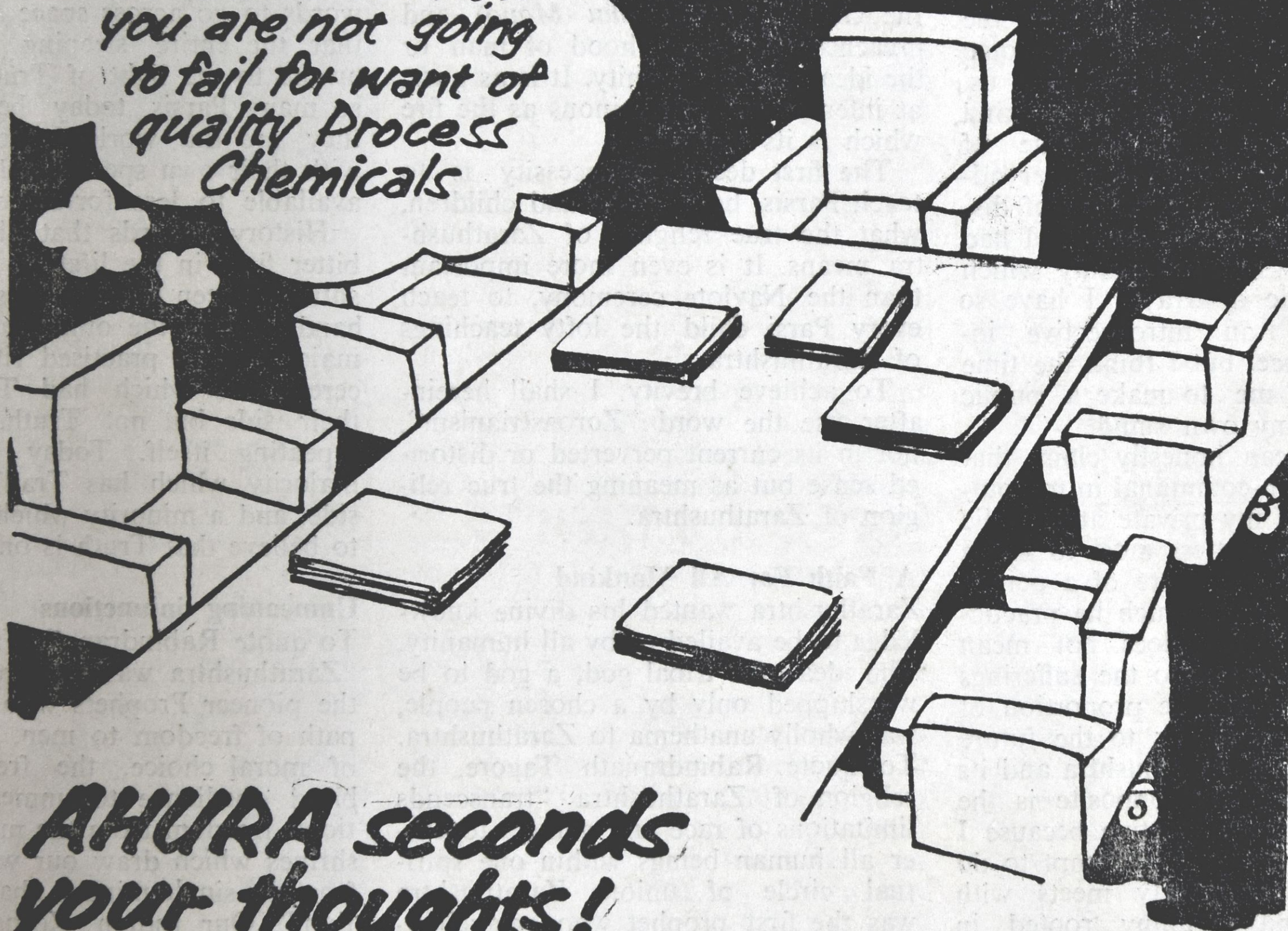
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Lost Horizons

Nani A. Palkhivala

Nani A. Palkhivala, eminent jurist and India's former Ambassador to the United States of America, gives his views on the Parsi community and the Zoroastrian religion in the following article, which was first published in The Bombay Samachar issue of 7 December 1980.

Some dear friends like Rustam Gagarat and Shiavax Vakil, Solicitors, and Jehan Daruwala, Editor of *The Bombay Samachar*, have pressed me to take an active role in seeking to uplift the Parsi community and in solving some of the grave problems which face us. *The Bombay Samachar* was kind enough to publish, in its issue of March 16, 1980, an Open Letter addressed to me, where a feeling of disappointment was expressed that I had done little for the community which is "in complete disarray". I have so far maintained an introspective intensity of silence, but I think the time has come for me to make a public statement of my own stand.

I believe I can honestly claim that I am totally non-communal in my outlook and in all my private and public dealings. What matters most to me is the character and calibre of a person and not the religion which he practices. This, however, does not mean that I am indifferent to the sufferings and miseries of a large proportion of our tiny community or to the future of the religion of Zarathushtra and its adherents. The exact opposite is the truth. I have been inactive because I know that any positive attempt to do good for the community meets with opposition and calumny rooted in ignorance. I know how Shiavax Vakil had to resign from the trusteeship of the Bombay Parsi Panchayat only because he had the courage and the intellectual integrity to suggest sensible steps to alleviate the pathetic plight of our co-religionists.

The Religion of Zarathushtra

If I have to choose — voluntarily, and not as an accident of birth, — a faith which has the deepest appeal to my mind and soul, I would unhesitatingly choose the religion of Zarathushtra. I believe that Zarathushtra was inspired by Ahura Mazda and that he experienced and gave expression to an ineffable illumination of Truth.

Unfortunately, there is an incredibly large and cavernous gap between the true religion of Zarathushtra and

Zoroastrianism as misunderstood and practised by many fanatical Parsis today.

The religion of Zarathushtra, in its pristine purity, is a religion which transcends all "religions". It is the noblest of faiths rooted in good thoughts, good words and good deeds, — the religion of truth, love and benevolence, the religion which postulates that happiness is to him through whom others are happy. It aims at establishing on earth the Kingdom of the Good Mind (*Vohu Mano*) and preaches the brotherhood of man or the ideal of human unity. It is as pure, as intense, and as luminous as the fire which is its symbol.

The first desperate necessity is to teach Parsis, both adults and children, what the true religion of Zarathushtra means. It is even more important than the Navjote ceremony, to teach every Parsi child the lofty teachings of Zarathushtra.

To achieve brevity, I shall hereinafter use the word "Zoroastrianism", not in its current perverted or distorted sense but as meaning the true religion of Zarathushtra.

A Faith For All Mankind

Zarathushtra wanted his divine knowledge to be availed of by all humanity. The idea of a tribal god, a god to be worshipped only by a chosen people, was wholly anathema to Zarathushtra. To quote Rabindranath Tagore, the religion of Zarathushtra "transcends limitations of race and gathers together all human beings within one spiritual circle of union. Zarathushtra was the first prophet who emancipated religion from the exclusive narrowness of the tribal God, the God of a chosen people, and offered it to the universal man".

The present-day followers of the Prophet have the converse outlook. They have been debating for decades whether the child of a non-Zoroastrian father and a Zoroastrian mother should be admitted into Zoroastrianism. Undoubtedly, the first Zoroastrian was Prophet Zarathushtra himself. If non-Zoroastrians could not be accepted as adherents of the new faith, how on earth could the Prophet have possibly promoted and disseminated his religion? If, quite obviously, the faith was spread by men and women who did not have a drop of Zoroastrian blood in them before conversion to the new faith, on what principle of

rationality can a child not be admitted to Zoroastrianism even when either of the child's parents is a Zoroastrian?

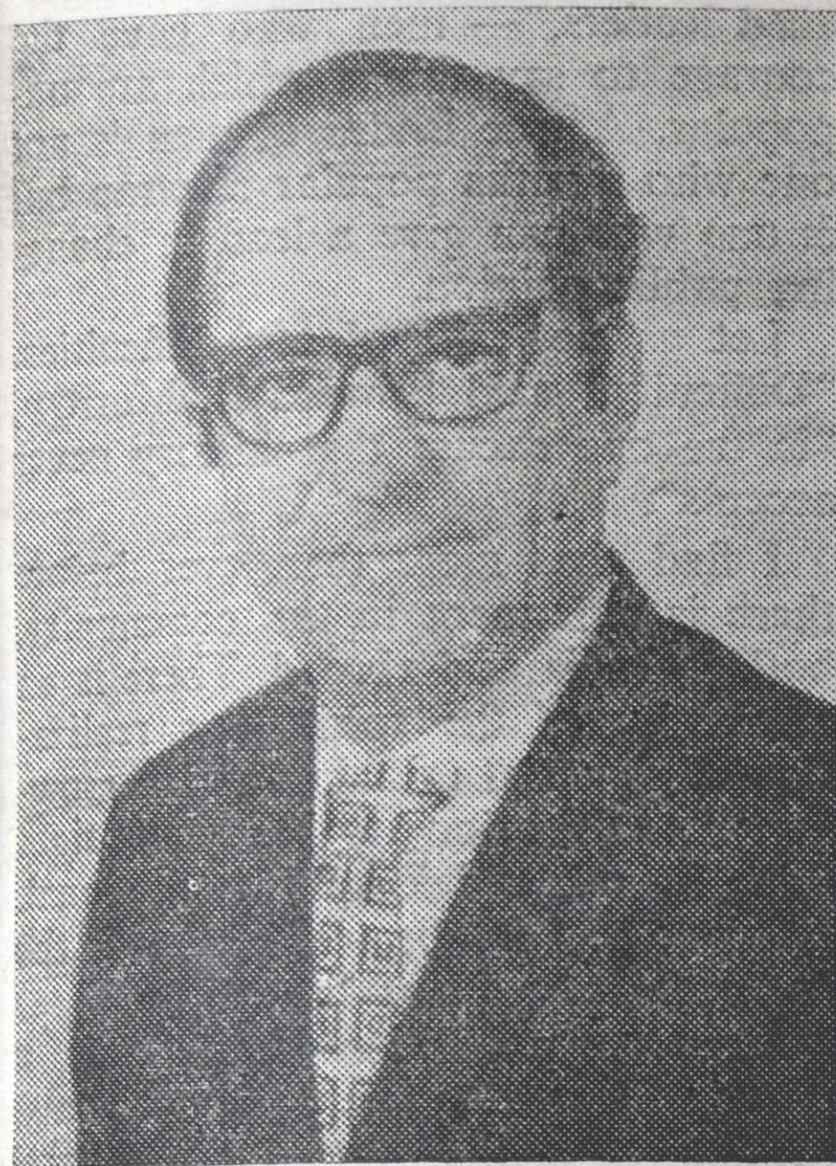
Zarathushtra's voice is the eternal voice, the living voice, not meant to be interpreted only by pouring over the dead myths or the desiccated facts of the little-known past. It is not the voice intended to guide merely the 125,000 individuals who constitute the minuscule Zoroastrian community today. Zarathushtra was the first of all the great Prophets who wanted his words to go across space and time so that the entire sleeping world may awake to the light of Truth. And yet so many Parsis today behave as if they are the world's chosen people with their own special god who is not available to less fortunate mortals.

History records that there was a bitter fight in the lifetime of Zarathushtra between his followers on the one hand, and on the other hand, the vast majority who practised ritualism and ceremonies which had Tradition on their side but not Truth. History is repeating itself. Today there is a majority which has Tradition on its side, and a minority which has reason to believe that Truth is on their side.

Unmeaning injunctions

To quote Rabindranath Tagore again, "Zarathushtra was the greatest of all the pioneer Prophets who showed the path of freedom to men, the freedom of moral choice, the freedom from blind obedience to unmeaning injunctions, freedom from the multiplicity of shrines which draw our worship away from the single-minded chasity of devotion." Our Indian Zoroastrians are marching in exactly the opposite direction. They deny "freedom of moral choice" to their co-religionists and they insist upon "blind obedience to unmeaning injunctions". They prefer fruitless acrimony to intelligent discussion. Contrast our conduct with the lofty ideal which Zarathushtra sang about in the *Gathas*: "Let each man choose his creed, with that freedom of choice which each must have at great events".

There has never been a religion which has espoused the cause of moral and mental freedom (within the framework of goodness and love) more eloquently than the faith preached by Zarathushtra. It is the saddest irony of history that the adherents of that religion should be the greatest opponents of all moral and mental



Palkhivala: Tradition and Truth

freedom.

In Zarathushtra's teachings, which are best reflected in the *Gathas*, there is hardly any mention of ritualism or worship. Noble conduct and high moral motives — *Vohumano*, *Asha* and *Armaiti* — represent the golden thread running through the *Gathas*. Today this great religion based on the highest moral and spiritual ideals has been so distorted that it has almost become indistinguishable from empty ritualism. Every religion gets encrusted over the centuries, and then the crust is mistaken for the kernel.

There are many customs and traditions among the Parsis which were perfectly sound when they first began because they were intended to cope with certain evils which beset the Zoroastrians who were living in an alien and hostile environment. Those customs and traditions have no value today when the outside danger has ceased, and yet they continue to be practised as if they were injunctions springing from the heart of the religion.

Change of Consciousness

To my mind, the first and foremost requirement is that there should be a change of consciousness among Parsis. Everything else is secondary.

The typical Parsi must get rid of his notion that his own beliefs and dogmas alone constitute the religion of Zarathushtra. He must not mistake ritual for religion and dogma for truth. He must eschew fanatical insistence upon traditions and customs which have no foundation in the ef-

We can be sure of one thing — we are millions of light-years away from the true religion of Zarathushtra.

fulgent teachings of Zarathushtra.

In-fighting and Puerile Controversies

Perhaps there is no other community in the world which has such an irresistible instinct for aggressive in-fighting as Parsis. No other group, so tiny in number, has more divisions than the Parsi community.

One Parsi is an intelligent, though often erratic, human being. Two Parsis form a religious faction. Three Parsis form two religious factions.

With pugnacity worthy of a better cause, we carry on totally frivolous disputations. The fierce intensity with which trivial issues are debated — issues which are wholly unconnected with the essence of our religion and the welfare of the community — is an absolute disgrace.

A man is as small as the things that annoy him. A community is as small in stature as the things it fights about. When the time and vigour of our community are dissipated in debating questions as to whether Parsis should have the funeral ceremonies performed if they use the crematorium, and whether a non-Parsi should be allowed to see the face of a dead Parsi after the funeral ceremonies are over, we can be sure of one thing — we are millions of light-years away from the true religion of Zarathushtra.

The energy of the community is but the sum total of the energies of all members of the community, and the community has no strength other than the aggregate of the strengths of its individual members. When our energy and strength are frittered away in controversies which are so puerile that they do not have the remotest bearing on the wellbeing of the community, the predictable result is our miserable plight today.

I have found that Parsi Zoroastrians in foreign countries like England, the United States and Canada have a far broader and more liberal outlook than the Parsis of India. If we persist in our present foolish course, those foreign countries may witness the future growth of true Zoroastrianism; and after some generations the Parsis of India (who number 91,000 today) will play only a secondary role.

Pathetic Economic Situation

The Parsis constitute the only community in India whose numbers are dwindling, since there are more deaths

than births every year. Only a few years ago there were 85,000 Parsis living in Bombay, as against 65,000 today.

The paradox is that while the number of Parsis is getting smaller and smaller, the housing problem is getting more and more acute. Over 3,000 applications for homes are pending before the Bombay Parsi Panchayat. Many couples cannot get married for want of a home, whilst several families are moving from sanatorium to sanatorium like gypsies.

We have charitable trusts which have funds sufficient to build houses but they have no land; while our other charities have land but no money to build houses. In any well-regulated group the problem would be easily resolved; the trustees of different trusts would join together to do the right thing by the community. Why cannot the trustees of Parsi charities bury their ego and sink their petty differences, and bring the land and money together to solve the problem of our homeless?

Clearly, there are legal ways of solving the problem, and of getting restrictive provisions in trust deeds removed. For instance, I am informed that the Cama Athornan Institute at Andheri has 48,000 sq. metres of land which has been lying idle for a number of years, while only about a dozen students are given their training in the profession of priesthood. Why cannot that land be used for middle class Parsis?

The second paradox is that the community with the largest public charities for its benefit is now plagued by growing poverty and unemployment. There is a steep rise in the number of Parsis who have taken to begging. The majority of the community suffer from malnutrition, while an unacceptably large percentage is almost destitute. Our priests, as a class, live below the poverty line and are as poor culturally as they are economically.

Past and Present

Our forefathers were men of tremendous foresight and vision. They bought the most valuable land available at that time and had the generosity to leave it for the benefit of future generations of Parsis. What a fantastic inheritance we have for the benefit of the community, and what

miserable use we are making of it!

Parsis have lived in Bombay for 300 years and have had a head start over other communities. For decades we were in the vanguard of social, educational and legal reforms, but today we are lagging far behind the other communities. Sindhis came here as refugees from Pakistan only 33 years ago, but in this short period they have built excellent housing colonies for all strata of their community and have also flourishing schools and colleges. This community of refugees has no problem of beggars and of the homeless. What a contrast to the deplorable state of the Parsi community which has been well established here for centuries! The Sindhis are a wellknit, cohesive community, — while the Parsi community is riven by senseless, almost insane, differences.

Solution —the Will to Act

What is the solution? The solution is to be found in three factors — (i) material resources, (ii) the talent and knowledge so to utilize our resources as to do the maximum good to the community, and (iii) the will to make prompt and imaginative decisions.

Material resources we do not lack. I am told that there are about 1,500 Parsi charities whose total funds are of the order of Rs. 30 crores.

Talent and knowledge are by no means lacking in the community. In almost every profession, every discipline and every faculty, Parsis are at the top.

What is truly lacking is the third factor, viz. the will to act decisively and imaginatively, the will to utilize the material and human resources for the community's uplift.

Our failure is not of resources but of the wisdom to use them. Our failure is not of opportunities but the failure to seize them. Our failure is not the failure of intellect but the failure of understanding and goodwill and of the will to act.

It depends entirely on the present generation of Parsis whether we shall progress economically, culturally and socially, and create the conditions in which we can continue to produce great men, or whether we shall become a decadent community with a glorious past, a perilous present and a dim future.

The Golden Age

Despite all the problems and difficulties which are facing us today, I still look upon our future with undiminished faith and hope.

I have no doubt in my mind that in ten years' time we can transform the condition of the community. We

need to be guided by wise and enlightened leaders, — men who have the courage to say things which are unpopular. A true leader of men is not one who mouths popular claptrap but is one who can give a lead in changing public opinion.

Let us not talk of our difficulties. "Difficulty," said Edward R. Murrow, "is the one excuse that history never accepts".

I find that more than ever before there is a ferment in the community, both in India and abroad. There is an awakening of the spirit — a realization of our past mistakes and a growing determination to do the right thing by our religion. This emotional, religious and intellectual revival is the harbinger of a great future.

Most communities have had a vision of a golden age, and most have located it in the distant past. Parsi Zoroastrians must locate it in the future, and greet the unseen with a cheer.

I shall be proud and happy if I am privileged to play my modest part in the resurgence of the microscopic community whose contribution to national progress remains unrivalled but can be matched again by our children in the Twenty-first Century.

Modern 'Times'

In the orthodox families of yore, during the period of a woman's menstruation, she was kept at a safe distance. Untouched by others, given a separate iron bed and chair, a separate set of clothes, she was regarded as being unclean, impure and a source of contamination for pious men and women.

Today however, times have changed and the Parsi who thinks otherwise is faced with a problem. We carry a question raised by a reader of the bi-monthly, *Ilm-e-Khshnoom* magazine, *Dini-Avaz* (August-September 1980), along with the publication's (abridged) answer. The *Ilm-e-Khshnoom* movement emphasises the mystical aspect of Zoroastrianism.

Q. We are a family of four — myself, my wife and two college-going daughters. Our flat is very small and during those "difficult days," which assail me regularly with three women in the house, I find it extremely difficult to practice even some

of the fundamental disciplines of Zoroastrianism. I'm sure there must be many like me who must be at their wits' end as to how to cope with the resultant problems.

Incidentally, my daughters refuse to co-operate, in that they scoff at Zoroastrian traditions pertaining to menstruation. Could you suggest some measures whereby I could at least pray at home, without sacrificing any of the basic principles of Zoroastrianism?

A. Some general guidelines for those who may find that there is almost nil co-operation from women at home.

(a) Do not expect others to sacrifice their comforts and style of living. It is you, who will have to make certain sacrifices quietly and without complaining.

(b) Avoid praying in the same room where a menstruating woman is present. You have to take care that you do not see or hear her and she does not see or hear you praying. Therefore, recite your prayers in whispers.

(c) Keep a separate chair or stool

aloof for you for prayers.

(d) If there is no extra room where you can pray without being disturbed during those "difficult days" of the women in the house, you may get up early and finish your bath and prayers before the others are up. If that is not possible, you may rest content (only in the last resort) by reciting the *Yatha Ahu Vairyo* and *Ashem Vohu* prayers in the prescribed numbers, as given in some of our Khordeh Avesta books, in lieu of the actual prayer...

(e) Try and keep *Ab-e-Zar* (*taro*) in the house, particularly at such times. If *taro* is objected to by any one at home, use a fresh lime.

(f) If you find that the woman concerned touches every item of furniture in the house, don't bawl at her. Instead, you see to it that you keep aloof from as many things in the house, without making a show of it or without inconveniencing others.

That's how it is, brother, in these hard times! Given the will and the zeal we are sure you'll make the grade. Good Luck!

AEK ATMAKATHA: The Life of Dastur Dhalla XI

The Truth About Taro and other Myths

Dr Maneck Nusserwanji Dhalla, high priest of the Pakistan Parsis, was a religious scholar of world repute. He has left to posterity a rich and precious legacy of wisdom and scholarship through his books on Zoroastrian theology, history, literature and life. 'Aek Atmakatha,' his autobiography in Gujarati, first published in 1942, has been translated into English by Gool and Behram Rustomji and published by the Dastur Dhalla Memorial Institute, Karachi. This is the eleventh condensed extract from the book — Dastur Dhalla: The Saga of a Soul.

THE STORY SO FAR

Born to a poor dastur family in Surat on 27 August 1875, Dhalla moved with his family to Karachi three years later. At the age of eight, he was married to five-year-old Cooverbai. Not being successful with his school career, Dhalla sought employment while educating himself in religious matters. The Parsis of Karachi made arrangements for him to study at the Madressahs of Bombay. While persuing his study of Iranian languages at the University of Bombay, Dhalla came into contact with various Parsi religious factions. He also met several prominent Parsis of the times,

A Zarthosti's day begins with the application of *taro* on his face, his head and his feet, by warding off the evil spirit by incantations and waging war against Satan. About 125 years ago it would be impossible to find a Zoroastrian home which did not have a bottle of *taro* throughout the year. This has been going on for generations.

Ever since the dawn of man's progress, domesticated cattle have been his most precious possessions. Besides supplying him with milk products, man began to put them to use as beasts of burden. The bull attained a sacred status amongst the Indo-Iranian Aryans as well as the Assyrians, Babylonians and Egyptians.

Amongst the Indo-Iranians the urine of these presumed-to-be sacred cattle was also credited as a purifier. After the two nations separated, each took back to its own country the san-

among who were Jamshedji Tata, Jeevanji Modi and Shapurji Saklatvala. Dhalla obtained his masters degree in Iranian languages from Bombay University and with the help of Tata, Saklatvala and others, spent four years at New York's Columbia University under the guidance of Professor A. V. W. Jackson, a well-known Zoroastrian scholar of the west. While in America, Dhalla lived frugally and remitted as much money home to Karachi as he could for household expenses now that his father was dead. Besides following the prescribed course of study, Dhalla read widely on his own, attended and gave lectures, and grew interested and involved with the debate on cremation prevalent at the time. In 1906 he secured his masters degree and in 1908 his Ph. D. from Columbia University. Four years in the west had altered Dhalla's outlook to life and religion. He was now a reformist rather than an orthodox, interpreting the literature and sacred writings of the Zoroastrians according to the principals of philology, and showing up fallacies and outdated ideas and customs. His study of sociology, anthropology and philosophy broadened his outlook. He was now the propogator of new concepts.

ctity of the cow's urine. When Spitama Zarathushtra revealed his grand new religion in Persia, he uprooted all the Indo-Iranian gods and goddesses, ceremonies and customs. But his reform did not remain in its pristine state after his death. The Indo-Iranian religion with its gods and goddesses, its ceremonials and rituals was resurrected, and became a part and parcel of Zarathushtra's exalted religion.

The hair of a pure white bull means *Varas* which gave rise to the name *Varasio*, a consecrated bull which became an intrinsic part of Zoroastrian rituals. This *Varasio's* urine and that of other bulls of the village is consecrated by an extensive and expensive ceremony called the *Nirangdin* and is then known as *Nirang*.

In Avesta cow's urine is called *gay-omaj*. Later the common people termed it *taro*. The sacred formula, or

spell, of Avestan *Manthra* is known as *Nirang* in Pazend. The wrong usage of the word *Nirang* for consecrated cow's urine is a later development. In the sacred *Gathas*, *Asho* Zarathushtra tells us that the life and spirit of Zoroastrianism is *Ashoi* — righteousness whereas in the *Rawayat* it is written that *Nirang*, the urine purified by prayers and ceremonies, is the soul and substance of the Zoroastrian religion. All the important as well as minor ceremonies are based on *Nirang* and as the warp and the woof are intertwined, *Nirang* is the basis of Zoroastrian rituals. At the time of the Navjote ceremony the child is given some *taro* to sip, and so is the bridal couple on the occasion of their marriage. This custom now remains merely as a mental palliative. An increasing majority hardly puts the cup to the lip. Some credulous men and women who believe that by performing ceremonies and adhering to customs they can improve their characters and attain spiritual enlightenment and salvation still take the sacred bath and drink *taro*.

Before proceeding to America for study I had lived a life steeped in *taro*. I foolishly imagined that miracles and wonders would happen by applying it to the body and by using it in ceremonies; but I had not fallen to the depths of quaffing cupfuls of it as some people gulp down potfuls of toddy. A deeply religious *behdin* gentleman of Karachi, who spent hours in prayer had great faith in the miraculous powers of the application and intake of *taro*. He was a great admirer of mine. I could not read or write with my right eye, so he very affectionately urged me constantly to leave off the craze of medical treatment and to lie flat on my back and place cotton-wool compacts dipped in *taro* over my eye every night. God be praised I did not abide by the advice of my noble, *taro*-worshipping physician. Perchance my eye would have been burnt and my slight vision lost.

I renounced the *taro*-tradition in New York. *Taro* disappeared from my whole family.

Only our own community is aware of our usage of *taro*, but there is another major communal practice that cannot remain hidden from the knowledge of other communities and that

is our observance of a woman's menstrual period.

Approximately half of the community's strength abides in Bombay. From olden times as per tradition, every Parsi home in Bombay had set aside a large room on the ground floor to be used by ladies during this period or during confinement due to the lack of lying-in hospitals in those days. Ladies living on the fourth or fifth floor spend five to seven days in this ground floor room and 40 days during confinement. Fifty or 60 years

The gaze of a woman in her menses defiled the moon, stars, sun and water.

ago every hawker going from door to door to sell his wares or any stray passer by was aware of this phase of Parsi life. In those days it was common to hear the *mobeds* who came for prayers or for persons bringing consecrated food, to shout in a clear voice, "Unclean women, turn away your unholy gaze".

My personal study revealed that detailed and lengthy writings regarding this question are available in our Avestan books and in old Sanskrit books of the Hindus. There are some references to this custom prevailing in other primitive nations also. Even today in some uncivilized and uncultured communities this practice continues.

When a woman reaches puberty, there is this natural flow of blood. Primitive man, in his ignorance looked upon this as a very serious and dangerous event. Blood was always used in sorcery. When it made its appearance in womenfolk, it was believed that during that period some impure and evil spirit had surrounded her. In such a condition she was kept apart in a little hut away from the home. It was supposed that her gaze, her touch or her voice would desecrate the atmosphere. Almost a 100 years ago, here as well as in Persia, at such times a woman would go and live in some isolated house in a Parsi locality and return home only after she was well again. During this period, except for drinking, water was not used for any purpose not even for cleanliness. *The Saddar* — book of the olden days — informs us that as the gaze of a woman in her menses defiled the moon, stars, sun and water, she was obliged to perform some important ceremony to atone for her sin.

This custom has remained only amongst the Parsis and a portion of the vast population of Hindus.

Most of our customs and practices have been handed down to us from the time of the *Vendidad* which dates back over 4,000 years. It was a Pastoral Age when our forefathers wandered from field to field and from season to season in search of fodder for their cattle. Later when Spitaman Zarathushtra advised them to settle in one place and to till the soil the agricultural age began. In both these ages the dog was man's constant companion and guide. He was a necessary part of people's lives. As he was considered an essential part of man's social life, he began to earn a place of prominence in man's religious life. According to the *Vendidad* he was *Pashushah Urva* the protector or shepherd of the flock.

The people of those days, according to their own light, reposed sanctity in the dog. They believed that he possessed some secret power to destroy the spell of evil spirits. His presence was necessary at the time of the sacred bath taken by *mobeds* qualifying for *Bareshnum*. Our forefathers believed that his glance had the miraculous power to defeat the *devs* and *devatas* that hovered over the corpse. Hence the ceremony of *Sagdid* 'the dog's glance at the time of the funeral rites, came to stay. From the time a person dies to the time he is taken to the Tower of Silence, the dog's gaze is fixed on that of the corpse. 4,000 years have gone by, yet this custom is retained.

In the savage age hair and nails formed an integral part of sorcery and black magic; hence as a precaution against their evil effects the literature on conventions in the *Vendidad* demands that any hair or nail that has been cut should be buried half a span under hard ground and a full span under soft soil, 10 feet away from pious people, 20 from fire, 30 from water and 50 from *Barsam*. A boundary line should be drawn around it and some Avesta prayers recited. A few devout people did this right up to the last century. The Pahlavi books *Bundehest* and *Shayast la Shayast* and the Persian book *Saddar* mention that if these regulations are not abided by, the scattered nails would become weapons in the hands of magicians.

While journeying by train vendors are heard calling: "*Brahmani Pani*" "Water for the *Brahmins*". In their fanaticism for cleanliness. *Brahmins* imagine themselves to be paragons of purity and believe that even the shadow of an untouchable would contaminate them. When we hear of such customs we ridicule the

Hindu community. But we forget there are occasions when we must confess that we are sailing in the same boat.

Our Persian law books written 400 years ago tell us that we should abstain from *ghee* prepared by non-Zoroastrians. We should not write with ink that is made by them. We should not dine with them. It was tabooed to eat or drink with Hindus, Muslims or Christians only a hundred years ago. Even today our *mobeds* are forbidden to dine at the same table with *Brahmins*, *Mullas* or priests.

Keeping pace with changing times and climes, nations alter their various customs regarding dress, food and eating habits and also those concerning marriage divorce, inheritance, distribution, etc. There are differences in minor matters also such as regulations regarding behaviour patterns. Orientals squat cross-legged on the floor. Westerners sit in a completely different fashion. Orientals assume that it is respectful to keep the head covered, whereas westerners uncover their heads as a mark of respect.

We consider it improper to dine or drink or move about bare-headed. The world does not hold the same opinion. We believe smoking to be sinful. The world does not believe so. To dispose of the dead in any other way besides *Dakhmanshin* is supposed to be an iniquity. The world does not look upon it as such. For a Zoroastrian not to wear the *sudra* and *kusti* and for certain Hindus not to put on the *janoi* is believed to be a sin. But the world does not believe so. Similarly what to others is sinful is not so to us.

Traditions are born of events, circumstances and common-sense. Traditions terminate with the change of times, circumstances and with enlightenment. But traditions die hard. Tradition-addicts do not wish to see the end of them. They are completely enamoured of them. They fight tooth and nail to defend the most impracticable customs.

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